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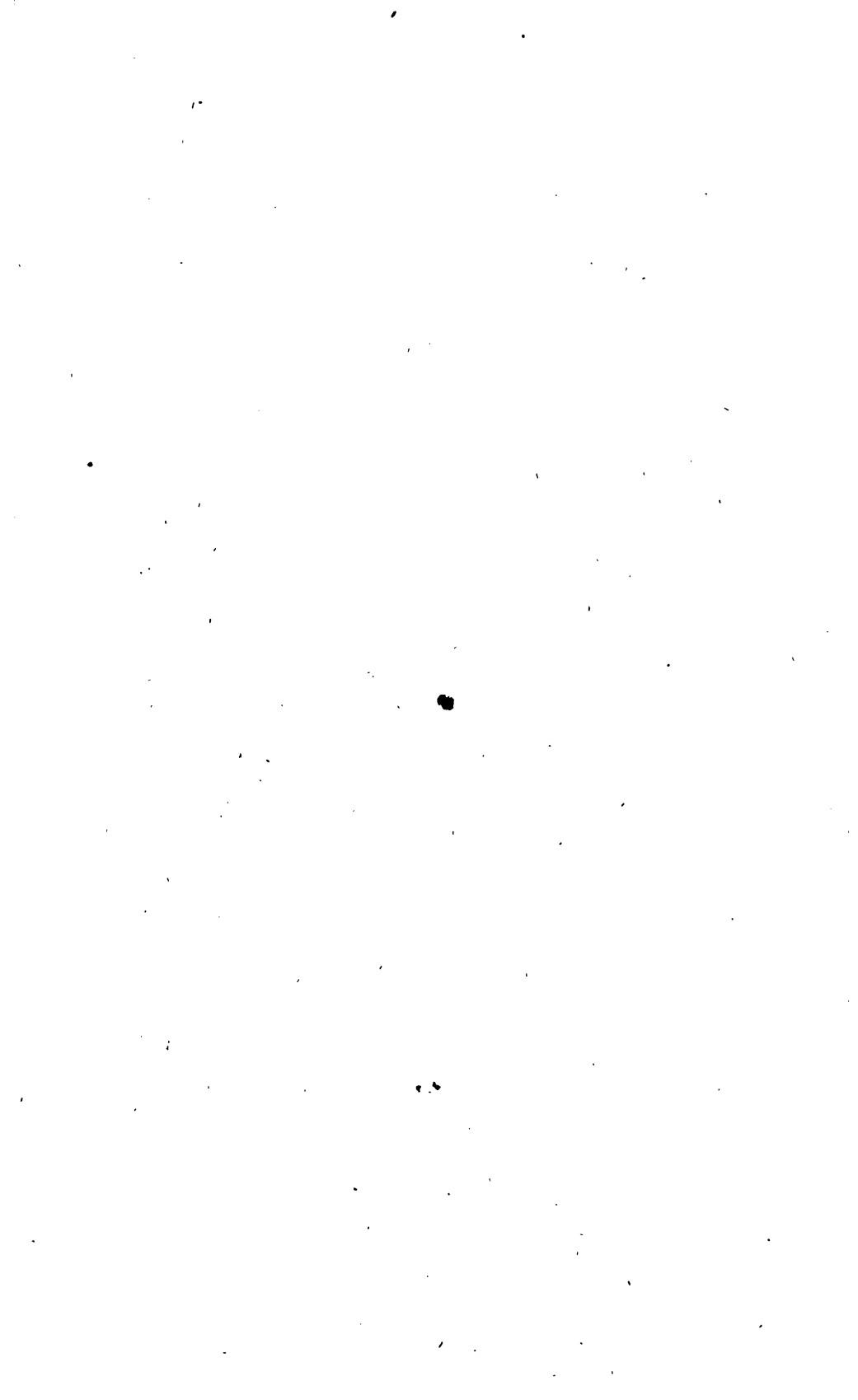
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S.H. 1826

BABINGTON.

A TRAGEDY.

BY

T. DOUBLEDAY,

AUTHOR OF "THE ITALIAN WIFE," ETC.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH: AND

T. CADELL, STRAND, LONDON.

M.DCCC.XXV.

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IT is scarcely necessary to premise, that the foundation of this Piece is the conspiracy of Babington against the life of Queen Elizabeth, and for the elevation of Mary Queen of Scots, and the Romish religion. Some incidents have of course been altered, and others added. The romantic, and to say the truth, somewhat too theatrical incident of the picture, is, however, strictly historical. The scene is laid alternately at London and at Dethicke, in Derbyshire, the seat of the Babingtons.

The precise time supposed to pass, the imagination of the reader must fix for himself.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

ANTHONY BABINGTON.

CHIDIOK TICHBOURNE, *Friend to Babington.*

TYLNEY,

CHAENOKE,

ABINGDON,

PLASKET, *a Jester.*

GARDEVIN, *an old Butler.*

BALLARD alias BOONE, *a Jesuit Agent.*

GIFFORD, *a Spy of Ballard's.*

SIR FRANCIS WALSINGHAM, *Secretary of State to Queen*

Elizabeth, and one of the Lords of the Privy Council.

SIR AMIAS PAULET, *Captain of the Queen's Guard.*

Officer, Huntsman, Gaoler, Soldiers, Attendants, &c.

The LADY MAUD, *Babington's Mother.*

AGNES, *a Ward of Babington.*

B A B I N G T O N.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber.*

GIFFORD, *folded in a large Cloak, enters, followed by WALSINGHAM, with his Sword drawn.*

WALSINGHAM.

There—farther yet—so ;—Root thee on that spot,
And if thou shift'st a foot, or hidest a hand,
That moment is thy last. We are alone,
Now speak.

GIFFORD.

I shall. We are alone ?—is't so ?

WALSINGHAM.

As freely as unto the savage air
Unpierced yet by touch of human voice,
Utter what thou would'st speak. Answer, what art thou ?

A

GIFFORD.

A man.—No less.

WALSINGHAM.

Nor more, I wot. What man?
What art thou?—speak. Methinks thy looks and bearing
Are all encrusted o'er with villainy.
Perchance thy tongue is better. Let mine ears
Set right mine eyes.—Say on. No quibbling, knave—
What art thou?

GIFFORD.

(*Aside.*) So peremptory, Right Honourable? A loud
crack may, peradventure, kill a snipe—marry, not me—
(*Aloud.*) What am I?—a puzzle!—a jest in earnest out
of the Statesman's Manual. A man and no man, a some-
body else. The incarnation of a piece of deep policy.
The fleshly link, my lord, between what you want to
know, and what you have to give. If you ask my name
—I give you that for to-day which I shall haply change
to-morrow—for a better! Even as you would do your
title, my lord. My lord, you seem troubled.

WALSINGHAM.

Within, there!—No. I will try one peg more.
Slave, dost thou think me some court light-o'-love,

Some high-fed dame, more liquorish than wise,
That thou can'st play the fortune-teller with me?
Think'st thou to mist mine eyes with saucy riddles,
Or muddle me with fulsome prophecies?
Mark me. A single word, aye, look of mine,
Can conjure up the thumb-screw and the rack;
Thy tongue shall be thy bail, and,—note me, sir,—
Wag to the truth—or else shall not wag long,
Except to howl.—

GIFFORD.

And mark you me, my lord;
I shall deal plainly, if but plainly dealt by;
You shall have ingots, if you pay in ducats;
'Tis honest barter, and 'tis mine.

Now, further,
As for your prisons and tormenting engines,
I say, take thought upon Perillus' Bull,
And look ye howl not in your own device.
I tell ye,—aught that ye inflict on me
But brings the mine, destruction, to your feet
More surely—so beware.

WALSINGHAM.

Thou art a villain!

GIFFORD.

I am a JESUIT.

WALSINGHAM.

Wast thou the devil—

The Belial that o'er-kings thy dark fraternity,
I'd wrench thy secret out.

GIFFORD.

(*After a pause, contemptuously.*)

Why look ye, my lord?—This may be “diamond cut diamond;” but ‘tis not, “well met, hail fellow.” Here have I told thee a *truth*; and how am I reguerdon’d? Why, with bluster. Like the crow in the fable, ya may cast pebbles into the pitcher till ye raise the water, but ye shall scarcely pump a Jesuit by dint of hard words. If ye want the truth, ye must e’en prime with the same commodity. This let me tell you—As for the rest, take heed that your shoulder rue not the rebound of your own harquebuss.

WALSINGHAM.

Thou talkest glibly—talk so on the rack.

GIFFORD.

Be sure I shall not talk more to the purpose.

—My lord, you are a statesman, and the world

Doth call you wise. E'en be it so. If your lackey,
Or any spaniel that doth page your heels,
Did know your secret heart, or was the prompter,
The wire-puller, the director of your acts,
Think ye I'd thrust my neck into your fangs
For the honour o'f?—No; no.

Now, if ye dea?

Thus in your own concernment, as I wot,
Why think a Jesuit shallower than yourself?
Deem ye the master-mind is register'd
On such a rag as I am? Would ye dig
In such a mean and common piece of earth,
To seek the treasure, Truth?

I am a Jesuit;

And being so, what am I? Less a man
Than a poor mould for an incarnate spark
Of the spirit of mine order. I am nothing
But what I am made; and what think ye is that?
Why, but a link of that invisible chain,
Whose end is in the clouds, but whose immensity
Can clasp the earth's circumference, and zone round
The waist o' the world—yea, can embrace her limbs,
And have enough to spare, and o'er her neck

Pass all unseen the shackle.—I am great
 While I am part ; but, sever'd from my fellows,
 Am nothing. Why, I were not worth a fire.
 What can ye gain by practising on me ?
 'Tis in *my* power to save you from destruction ;
 'Tis in *your* power but to destroy yourselves.
 Would ye do that ? If so, then let me hang,
 And stop the breath of your intelligence.
 —What would you say, my lord ?

WALSINGHAM.

Thou art a fiend,
 And gloriest with a fiendish impudence,
 As mischief were thine element more than life.
 —What can'st thou do to prove these boasts of thine ?
 If thou know'st aught against the Queen and State,
 Speak it, and say at once what's thy reward.
 Here's gold enough to buy a thousand pardons,
 Should'st e'en betray the Church that sells thee them.

GIFFORD.

Put up your purse, my lord ! A ton of gold
 Were but a hair to weigh me from my purpose.
 —What can I do ?—Oh ! wise and profound statesman,
 What would ye have me do ? What is the key-stone

Of policy?—a patient perseverance.
If ye but drop a seed into the bosom
Of the ne'er-barren earth, do ye not watch
And tend it as the mother doth her babe,
Nor deem 'twill spring at once? What can I do?
Mark if I know at least what should be done.
Know ye the visage of your enemy
When ye behold it?

(*He shews a Miniature, richly adorned.*)

WALSINGHAM.

(*Aside.*) It is she herself,
As splendid as resistless, and more fateful
Than is the stayless lightning—Cockatrice!
The rascal's right enough, but every knave
Hath like intelligence.

GIFFORD.

(*Aside.*) Ha! have I moved ye?

WALSINGHAM.

(*Aside.*) 'Tis set with gems, and this fantastic legend
Here, i'the casket, is her character.

GIFFORD.

You are struck, my lord. Know ye that glitt'ring mis-
chief?

WALSINGHAM.

(*Hastily.*) Where got'st thou this?

GIFFORD (*with assumed coolness.*)

Too fast, my lord! Before you expect me to tell you that, ask if I know it myself. Thus came I by it—with my instructions!—and whence came they? canonically; even as an angel's message; out of a cloud!—Plainly, in three words I know not.

WALSINGHAM.

I'll make thee know——

GIFFORD.

Why, would it not be better

If I made thee?

I tell thee what, Sir Francis,
As 'tis in vain to seek what is not lost,
So that can not be found which is not hid.
Thou might'st as well attempt to gyve the Echo,
And make her tell what 'tis she babbles of,
As question me. I am a tool that must
Be used one way, or else am useless; use me,
And I am yours. Crush me, and you are lost.
Ye cannot burst the doors of destiny,
But ye may pick the lock. I know the windings

Of all its intricate wards, or else shall know.

Patience, and try again-----

Nay, stop me not;

Or if you do, my lord, tell me but this-----

The question's candid---Have I warn'd you not

Against your enemy? Thus far have I kept

The crown o' the causeway. Good. What see you in me---

I say what see you, that you need to start

As if I were the Archfiend, come to lure

Your steps to his burning mine? What I would ask

Is granted e'en as easy as 'tis heard,

And that should sure be easy.

WALSINGHAM.

What dost ask?

CIPPOED.

No mighty matter. I have shewn I know

Those you would know, and those that well knew you.

I come to warn you of their dark devices.

If ye will take the warning, as 'tis given,

Nor, like the sturdy beggar, scorn an alms,

Because 'tis not a largess, let me have

Access to you, and upon what I tell you

E'en let your servitors proceed, or not,
As ye see fit. What would ye further? Let me
Have a short conference with some one in trust,
And what I promise, prove.

WALSINGHAM.

It shall be so;

Within there.

Enter SIR AMIAS PAULET, and an Officer.

Hark, Sir Amias—Sir, you may retire. [*Exit Officer.*
(Aside.) Mark ye this man. I say, note down his face,
Not his habiliments; for happily
He hath as many forms as Proteus,
As changeable as is an April sky,
And, ten to one, more treacherous. Mark him.

(Aloud.) Now, sir,
What is't that you would say?

GIFFORD.

The Queen, four days hence,
Takes boat at Whitehall.—Doth she not, my lord?

WALSINGHAM.

How know'st thou that?

GIFFORD.

I ask thee ; doth she not ?

No answer !—Nay, you need not gaze at me
So fixedly, Sir Amias. I am true
As you yourself, and that you are, *I know.*
But to the coil in hand. Let not her Majesty
Forego her expedition—only this
Perhaps were well.—Contrive that her attendance,
Without apparent foresight, be well arm'd.
Not with a show of guard—but let the gallants
Who page her progress, or who pay their court,
Be of that sort ye wot of. So, there's fear
Without the threat'ning. So much for the present ;
Next day, if she doth change her wönted airing,
And go to Richmond with the French Embassador,
That is her private purpose, peradventure
There may be need of more. But in that time
I will speak with ye, so ye scorn me not,—
Now let me have free passage.

WALSINGHAM.

One word more.

GIFFORD.

No, not a sound. My errand is told out,

And I am held to th' tale. My words are number'd,
 My very breath is meted, and I deal not
 In over measure.

SIR AMIAS.

This is insolence.

My lord, let me essay him, and I'll warrant-----

GIFFORD.

Wait for your warrant!

Mark me, Sir Amias,

You were sent here to listen, not to prate.

(Turning to WALSINGHAM.) My tongue is but an echo,
 and my voice

Pitch'd to the tenor of another pipe;

With which it falls or rises. I am dumb,

Because MY MASTEE wills it. Who is he?

He were a scholar who should answer that---

Your password, my lord.

WALSINGHAM.

Within there! Sir Amias, let him have
 Safe conduct.

Enter Officer.

SIR AMIAS.

He shall have't, my lord.

WALSINGHAM.

Go, sir.

GIFFORD.

I thank your lordship. Ye shall hear of me.

[*He goes out with the officer.*

WALSINGHAM.

Now, Sir Amias—What think ye of this?

SIR AMIAS.

Even that we have a snake by th' tail ; that's all.

If we be rough, he stings us—If we slip
Our vantage, he enshrouds him in his hole,
Would I had once his head beneath my heel !

WALSINGHAM.

Have with you, Sir Amias. We must take
Some counsel upon this. There may be truth,
Though, certes, small may be our gain thereby,
If Jesuits' truth be slippier than a lie.

Come, sir, time calls on us.

[*They go out.*

SCENE II.—*An Apartment in BABINGTON's House.*

Enter PLASKET and GARDEVIN.

PLASKET.

Why, Master Gardevin, according to thee, the world is like a huge cheese filled with maggots, which only serve to shew it is rotten ?

GARDEVIN.

Thou say'st well, Master Plasket. Rotten ? marry, we are turned topsy-turvy, man, woman, and child, methinks.

PLASKET.

Topsy-turvy ? why, with the children that may sort well enough ; but the women ? Master Gardevin,—oh, fie !

GARDEVIN.

Go to, go to. Thou art a wag by profession, and turnest people's sayings, even like thine own jerkin, with the lining outward; but it cannot hold long, or I look to brew in January and see snow at midsummer.

PLASKET.

Why, what is wrong now ?

GARDEVIN.

Why, what is right now? have not we all turned worldmenders, forsooth? and are not old customs hunted down like foxes, or only borne with to make sport? no, marry, nothing that is old will go down now.

PLASKET.

Yes, one thing.

GARDEVIN.

What thing, Master Plasket?

PLASKET.

Why, your old wine. That goes down as well as ever, Master Gardevin. We still chaunt—(*He sings.*)

“ I’m married, though single, believe me, sir knight,
My bottle’s my doxy, and she’s my delight;
So keep to your wedlock, as I keep to mine;
Take you your old dame, and give me my old wine.”

Sung I not well, Master Gardevin?

GARDEVIN.

Aha! go to, Master Plasket, go to; thou art a wag still. Old wine, sayest thou? troth hardly. Your heretical Lollards must meddle there, too. Marry, come up—your Malmsey, and your Tent, and your Tawney Mountain, and your fiery Sherris, are looked down upon

now for French slip-slops. By my halidome, your very waiting wenches will boggle at a cup of strong ale to break their fast i' the morning, for fear of their favour, forsooth. They're mad, and that at both ends, that's certain—and now, instead of housewifery, they must play o' the virginals. When they should be pickling, they con play-books, and instead of making conserves, are making love—as they call it.

PLASKET.

Which is no conserve, sayest thou? eh! Master Gardevin?

GARDEVIN.

Aha! go to—go to—thou art a sad wag, Master Plasket. Then, there's the men. I thought what their tinkering would come to. After mending everything, they've ta'en to mending their religion, with a murrain!

PLASKET.

Which should have mended them, Master Gardevin.

GARDEVIN.

Mended them? ay, truly, not without need. Well, Heaven mend us all, and Heaven mend the times.

PLASKET.

Thou rememberest good old times, Master Gardevin.

GARDEVIN.

Remember? do I not?—ah! well do I remember—in old Harry's days. There was I, a whipeter; I abode then by Walthamstow; I wot I had a touch o' the sweating distemper, and Father Abbot (who but he?) would send one of the lay brothers with herbs and medicinals, ay, and wine, Master Plasket, from his own blessed hands, till the fit left me; and then, the holy Father himself took ill o' the falling sickness.

PLASKET.

The falling sickness? Wine would be a bad cure for that, Master Gardevin.

GARDEVIN.

Ah! go to—go to; thou art a wicked wag, Master Plasket;—and I, as in duty bound, went every morning to inquire after the health of the good Father. There was always a good flagon of ale, and a cold chine, or, peradventure, a venison pasty; and nothing in return but to pray for Father Abbot. Small need was there to bid me do that, I trow!

PLASKET.

No; I dare swear thou would'st pray that thou might'st long have to inquire after Father Abbot.

GARDEVIN.

Could I do less? Ah! these were the good old times!
I stomach not these reformations, Master Plasket.

PLASKET.

Thou sayest well—for thy faith is mainly in thy stomach, methinks.

GARDEVIN.

Ah! go to; thou art a wag by profession, and never faillest—In my stomach! Well, Heaven send such times again, for this house looks not like itself.

PLASKET.

How so?

GARDEVIN.

How so? askest thou that? There was my old lord—he would wake the lark with his bugle, be she never so early, and see his horn of October froth and sparkle in the first sunbeam. Then we welcomed the evening star with a catch, did we not?—Now, there is nothing but haunting the renegado Court, or close colleaguing, Heaven knows for what! Doth not the sun shine, and the does leap, as heretofore, Master Plasket? I like not that Master Boone. He may smooth it i' the sunshine; but I have heard him pace his turret-chamber by the hour, when

he deemed none but the moon saw him. Would all may go well, Master Plasket ;—but the crows have not shifted for nothing.

PLASKET.

Shifted ?

GARDEVIN.

Why, know ye not they have left the great elms, where they have housed these two hundred years ? all the house knows that ; and, as I am a sinner, I have not eyed a rat i' the cellar these two months. Well, well, the sky is over our heads, Master Plasket. Will ye taste a cup of March beer i' the buttery ?

PLASKET.

Excuse me, Master Gardevin ; as I croak not like thee, I need not thy cordial.

GARDEVIN.

Sayest thou so ? If fools get out o' fashion, wilt thou croak then ? and if laughter be banished, I trow, fools will soon follow.

PLASKET.

Why, Master Gardevin, certes, fools may get out o' fashion, but folly never—that's my comfort.

GARDEVIN.

Ah ! go to—go to ; thou never faillest. Well, God be wi' ye—now I think on't, my lady will be looking for her posset.

[GARDEVIN goes out.]

PLASKET.

He speaks too truly. In this seething age,
In the times' ferment, when the basest natures
Work strongest from beneath, authority
Grows jealous, and thinks e'en the tone of truth
Smacks of sedition. Yet I blame them not.
The heavens are full of clouds. Untimely glooms
Hang, prophesying tempest, o'er the land.
The hearts of men lack sunshine, and the flowers
Of jocund mirth are dead. E'en this old man,
Whose tongue hath still held chime with revelry,
More tunesome than the grasshopper to spring,
Or winter cricket by the crackling fire,
Grows sad, he knows not why ; and babbles o'er
His homely auguries ; and looks i' the sky
For sorrow coming, if the north wind whistles
Sadler than wont.—

Nay, have not even I
Beeome infected with this melancholy,

And almost swear the midnight gusts do groan
And hurtle round the turrets of this house,
Not as they used to do? It is observed,
The herons have forsworn these ancient woods,
And strangely left their unininvaded nests
Heirlooms to th' hooting owls; ev'n at high noon,
The peacock flies th' accustom'd gate, and hides
I' the sedge; and country churls do cogitate
And note these things; yea, shake their heads, and raise
Forgotten tales, and on a freak of nature
Build up a thousand auguries. There are some
Will shew you how the bright and daisied rings,
The steps of fairies on the green, are blasted;
And thus, they say, good spirits take their leave,
And woe steps o'er the threshold.

Even so:

Thus runs the world. How often do we see
The born in sunshine darkle to their end,
And joy, to those in sorrow, rise too late!
We are but Fortune's toys, and, like a child,
She tires and takes a new one.

Enter AGNES.

Save you, lady !

Now, be your heart as light as is your foot,
In sooth I heard you not.

AGNES.

Good-morrow, Plasket.

For one who still must run a tilt at wit,
Methinks you're grave to-day.

PLASKET.

Why, truly, lady,
Perhaps I may be. To the merriest feasts
Unwelcome guests will come.

AGNES.

You may say so.

PLASKET.

May I, in sooth ? Gramercy, what is here !
Now, Heaven forefend—a sigh, and from such lips,
Where smiles still seem'd to banquet, as the bees
Hang, never satiate, on the fragrant thyme !
Well, Heaven be thank'd, the remedy is easy,
And leeches nigh at hand.

AGNES.

What is thy cure ?

PLASKET.

A jolly bridal and a handsome groom,
The true physician—would 'twere my degree !

AGNES.

So should the cure be worse than the disease,
As it is, haply, nine times out of ten.

PLASKET.

Now, out upon you for a never-pleased !
Is there not one of all the cavaliers
Who haunt, like spirits, the circle of your glance,
Can hit your squeamish fancy ?

AGNES.

As thou needs
Must talk, e'en talk what foolery thou wilt,
Only, expect me not to answer thee.
If that mine eyes were but a brace of dice,
They might attract some gallants that we wot of.

PLASKET.

Nay, lady, never task your gentle nature :
Silence and woman were false heraldry—
They never quarter in the same escutcheon.
What can you libel now 'gainst Master Charnock ?
Sure he's no dicer ? A grave cavalier,

And tall, withal, and of a stately presence ;
 He hath rich manors, too, which, as good land
 They say should do, feed everything but lawyers.—
 What can you say to him ?

AGNES.

Why, little, truly :
 And he to me as little. He's a bigot,
 And frowns at you as 'twere the ghostly father,
 And you had come to shrift. Nay, name him not :
 He's too cautious for my venturing on ;
 Besides, he's half a miser, and would fear
 His angels might find wings. I'll none of him.

PLASKET.

What think you, then, of lordly Abingdon,
 The brave and splendid, and just old enough
 To know *how* to be young ?

AGNES.

What think I of him ?
 What should I think of one that's made of iron,
 Save that he's a good piece of workmanship ?
 'Twould pose, I'll warrant, your cunning Flemish artist,
 Or him who made the clock at Nuremberg,
 To forge a better ; though I should not grudge

A hundred shillings for him. There's a largess—
That's praise enough, is't not?—What! discontented
Still? Why, you're marv'lessly unreasonable,
Good Master Plasket.

PLASKET.

I shall fit ye yet, lady,
Maugre your jibes—There's gentle Tichbourne, ah!

(*He sings.*)

She loves not Sir Ulric, the bold and free,
She loves not Sir Edred the tall;
But dearly, under the greenwood tree,
She loveth young Artingal.

Methought I should come over you at last—
Said I not well? Tichbourne's the man. Ev'n he,
The gallant Chidiok, gay Southampton's star,
As light and sparkling as the gossamer
That seems a thread of sunshine, and as quick,
And yet as gentle, as the swallow's flight;
Soft as the stream whereon the moonbeams sleep,
As clear in honour, and in soul as deep,
Ay, and as rash when stirr'd. I'faith, I clinch
Your choice—he is mine own favourite, after all!

AGNES.

Too fast, good Plasket. Trust me, you have ta'en

No easy gear in hand. Tichbourne's too light ;
 In course, too like the summer butterfly,
 That flutters on and on with glittering wing,
 But recks not why nor whither. As the friend
 Of Babington, I would not speak him ill,
 But he's too gay, in truth.

PLASKET.

Now, say you so ?

In truth, I would he might infect my lord
 With that same gaiety you marvel at ;
He's wondrous grave o' late. He hath almost sour'd
 My store of jokes, as thunder doth small beer,
 For the last two months.

AGNES.

Fie, you wrong him, Plasket,

The noble Babington is not severe.
 High-thoughted gravity may haply sit
 Upon his brow enthron'd, and loftier promptings
 Make the shrunk world look little, that perchance
 He recks not of it, like a meaner man.
 But mark that brow when it unbends itself ;
 And mark his eye, when it declines, at last,
 On Pleasure, who sits smiling at his feet ;

And shew me one whose port bespeaketh more
High nobleness and courtly gallantry,
Friendship, and all that doth become a man.

PLASKET.

(*Aside.*) Comes the shaft thence?—

You're an enthusiast, lady.

AGNES.

It may be so. Hath he not been my brother,
My play-mate, guardian, tutor, all in one?

PLASKET.

(*Aside.*) And thou would'st make him husband; would
he were!

(*A loud.*) It is true, lady. Marry by my fay,
Here comes our lady mother.

Enter LADY MAUD.

Save you, madam.

LADY MAUD.

Good day, good Plasket; what hast thou in hand?
Methought I heard your tongue push'd even now
Beyond its wonted amble.

PLASKET.

What in hand?

A cause—a cause—and that *sans fee*, good madam,
A most pernicious precedent for lawyers.

LADY MAUD.

Whose cause?

PLASKET.

Why, even the gentle Master 'Tichbourne's,
Whom this fair critic here finds full of faults.
I pray your ladyship, take her in hand.

LADY MAUD.

Not I—not I—but Babington is here,
And he shall well ensurety his friend.
You may retire, good Plasket. [PLASKET goes out.

Enter BABINGTON.

How now, son;

You are just in time to end a controversy,
Ay, and reclaim a dangerous heretic,
Who hath blasphemed against your dear friend Tich-
bourne—
I pray you put in your authority.

BABINGTON.

- That were much pity, madam. When soft means
Will work a cure, the church disclaims all violence,

And here they have done so ever. To say truth,
I should most vilely play the guardian now,
My place so long hath slept into disuse.
But if truth, honour, generosity—
A mind as pure as is the blood sustains it—
A tongue match'd only by the speaker's deeds,
May win a woman, why, then, gallant Tichbourne
Can never lack an argument of mine.
What say you, Agnes?—How now?—Not a word!

LADY MAUD.

What should she say? List to me, childish trifler;
In wedding Tichbourne, thou wedd'st worth and honour
That is the first; and, in the next degree,
Prosperity beyond the reach of chance—
A name, nobility, and splendour, grace,
Which shame nor poverty have e'er obscured,
Nor ever shall, or can. If Heaven would stoop
To please your sickly fancy with a husband,
And fashion him to the pattern, tell me, girl,
What could'st thou ask for more?—Speak to her, son.

AGNES.

I pray you spare me, madam.

LADY MAUD.

Babington,

Are you dumb too ?

BABINGTON.

Madam, an' if my breath
Could, in its sway, outvie the winds of spring,
That from their plumes drop beauty, youth, and health,
'Twere not too much for my dear friend's deservings.
Heaven hath shower'd down on him prosperity,
And may God grant it lasting—may it 'scape
The blight of tyrannous power—ay, and the sweep
That ever must attend on vengeance' wing
Whene'er she lights upon a darken'd land.

LADY MAUD.

This is another theme.

BABINGTON.

Madam, forgive me
That I forestall your words. Pray, bear with me
For once. You gave me life, and, next to that
In value, Truth, and reverence for the truth
I will speak truly. Tichbourne is a spirit
That beauty's self might be content to worship ;
So let her take him. But, in this drear time,

When to be faithful is to be suspected—
When to be honourable is to be distrusted—
When change strides o'er men's heads, and sets her foot
Upon the noblest necks—who is so good,
But he shall be a mark for those whose archery
Is bent to strike the fairest? Who so humble,
But he shall be an eye-sore unto those
Whose best religion lies in innovation?
In nature's throes, when inward motion shakes
The frightened earth, and the tumultuous waves
Rage like the wild despair, 'twere worse than vain
Sometimes to cast an anchor.

I have spoken;
Now, madam, say what you would say.

AGNES.

Hear me.

Beseech you—here I have the deepest stake,
Although the weakest player. Hear me, sir,
For you are honourable, and hear me, madam,
For you are kind.—Oh, sir! answer but this.—
If in some storm, such as e'en now you spoke of,
You were to risk your whole—if in one cast
Went all that should be dearest—peace and love,

And those you loved, and those that have loved you—
State, happiness, content, soul, heart, and all,
Would you not pause?—would you not hesitate,
Tremble, and stop, and shrink, as I do now?
Oh, press me not—am I not happy here?
And here I know I can be, so please Heaven
And you to suffer me. Alas! alas!
I grieve you.

BABINGTON.

(With agitation.) No; no more—I am not well.

LADY MAUD.

Sure thou turn'st pale.—How came these shadowy fancies
To cross your mind in such unlucky wise?
You take these things too strongly. This springs, son,
From too much talk and indoors thought, the while;
Where are your hawks, or those two foreign hounds
That Charnock sent you? This is phantasy.

BABINGTON.

I pray you chide me not. 'Tis nothing, madam.

Enter SERVANT.

Thine errand?

SERVANT.

Sir, here is young Master Tichbourne,
With Master Tylney, and with Abingdon,
New lighted from their horses at the gate.

[SERVANT *goes out.*

BABINGTON.

Wilt please you, madam, to receive them ? I
Shall be with you anon. 'Twas a brief spasm
From over-study ; nothing else, believe it.
Come, Agnes, you shall bid young Tichbourne welcome.

LADY MAUD.

You follow, son ?

BABINGTON.

I follow in a breath.

[AGNES and LADY MAUD *go out.*

How light a whisper can awake the heart !
Methought my bosom steel—that I could go
To danger as 'twere to a marriage rite—
With such composed cheerfulness—when duty
And honour bade me there ; and lo ! the softness
Of yon meek girl, and the unconscious pleadings
Of maiden fearfulness, have moved my heart
To very childishness.

I would not meet them
With trace of aught remorseful in mine eyes,
Lest it infect theirs too—though it is hard
To chase the bosom's shadows from the brow.
They say, that when the Ocean's surface stirs,
The depths are still at rest ; but when below
All is commotion, where's the power can bid
The waves keep down their heads, and to a calm
Smooth the blue superficial ? Yet must I
Essay this task, and with sad bosom go
To welcome pleasure, while the heart says no.

[BABINGTON goes out.]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber in BABINGTON's House.*

Enter BALLARD and a HUNTSMAN.

BALLARD.

This meeting's dangerous. What thou would'st say,
Speak, and begone.

HUNTSMAN.

I only stay to hear
Such message you may think fit to breathe
To the Ruling Ear.

BALLARD.

Devotion to the order ;
An eye that rests not, nor a heart that shakes ;
A zeal that cannot freeze—'tis idle all—
Had I not these, why do I sojourn here ?
Say that all's well—no more ;—yes ; nearer still—

(*In a low tone.*) I'll draw his fangs, but from his den
must first

Lure forth the serpent.—Mark the words, say this—
Begone—stay—What to Babington, even now,
Brought'st thou from Charnock ?

HUNTSMAN.

E'en two foreign hounds,
Of Germany, I think.

BALLARD.

'Tis well—begone !

[HUNTSMAN *goes out*

Take hence thy fawning eye, that spy'st at once
Upon and for me. I am past them now ;
Too deeply in for any will to master
Except mine own ; and, for my countermine,
The college shall work hard to delve so deep.

Enter GIFFORD.

Gifford, how now ?

GIFFORD.

I come, sir, by the card—

I have succeeded

BALLARD.

Speak low.—Art thou sure ?

GIFFORD.

As sure as one well-crafted politician
Is of another. What I did impart
They swallow'd, as you'd have them.

BALLARD.

Art thou sure

They traced thee not ? If thou hast been a trail
To draw their bloodhounds hither, woe to thee ! mark me,
Art sure they track'd thee not ?

GIFFORD.

I'll pawn my soul on't.

BALLARD.

Pawn something better ! noted'st thou of any
That met thee on the way, or else outrode ?

GIFFORD.

No one have I beheld,—except, e'en now,
A squinting fellow in the corridor ;
A falconer of Master Charnock.

BALLARD.

Oh !

He hath been here belike to babble of

Some foreign hounds, or something of such sort.
Thou hast done well ; retire. The business
That's now in hand requires some space of thought.
Go ! and be wary.

[~~GIFFORD~~ retires.]

Now am I in mine element,
The world of subtle thought—ay, thoughts that soar
Like eagles, 'mid the lightning-parted clouds,
And play amid their flashes. Hover now
Round me, ye demons that o'er-rule the storm ;
That point the lightning at the stagg'ring bark ;
Or urge the rushing clouds ; or, laughing, stride
The billow that engulfs the struggling wretch,
And grin in his drench'd face.

Come to my breast,
Thou spirit, that can't ride upon the waves
Calmly, as if they roll'd not, and impel
The buried helm with an untrembling hand ;
For 'tis thy time ;—now, when the lowering clouds
And troubled ocean darkly seem to meet,
Brewing the coming tempest. Let it fall
As 'twill—small care of mine ! I am the master
In this momentous chase, and can unleash

My hounds on whom I will. Eye sees them not.
Darkly they sweep, like the wild Indian dog,
Through trackless forests and eternal shades ;
Aghast the trav'ller hears th' approaching bay,
The savage rush, and headlong flying game,
And all is still again ; nor sees he whence
It came, nor whither it goes—no matter whither,
So that the spoil be mine.

I have two paths
Before me, and but pause which I must take.
There was a time when, if I were but *high*,
I would have sat me on the rugged rock
As soon as the soft sward ; 'tis not so now.
I have drank new passion since I saw this house :
Ambition stoops to take a yoke-fellow ;
And the strong speed of iron Resolution
Lags for a flower i' th' way. Why should it not ?
Say that there be two heights which I may scale,
Still shall I choose the greenest ; and where'er
The flowers of dalliance shall the soonest bud,
There do I fix my climate. (*A clock strikes.*)

"Tis the hour ;—

And now to govern the hot fiery spirits
That stoop to be mine instruments ; to blow
Their flames on high, as doth the cunning smith
Until his work be forged—then—quench them, haply
With blood instead of water.—Fools ! but ask them
What brings them to this venture ; one shall talk
Of loyalty, another whine of love,
Another friendship, and a fourth religion ;
Ay, marry,—even so. If they will play
Without a stake, they get their rubs for nothing.
Of all Love's, Loyalty's, or Religion's jokes,
Your martyrs are the sorriest. I must be gone.

[BALLARD goes out.]

SCENE II.—*A large Hall.*

Enter BABINGTON.

Methinks there is a weight upon the air,
As if the clasping element sympathized
E'en with our bosoms. Be it so. This heaviness
Is nature's impost. When Columbus launch'd
Upon the ocean of his enterprize,

Until the sun-tipp'd Spanish hills were lost,
Even that elated and expansive spirit
Did linger on the land that he was leaving,
As lead were on its wings. Lend me thy plumes,
Oh Love ! to lighten mine. Nerve me, oh Honour !
To this most just, but perilous enterprize—
Fame, let me mount up to thy firmament,—
Or, if I fail, even like those wand'ring stars
That plunge into th' obscure abyss of night,
But leave a glorious track of light behind them,
So let me perish.

*Enter BALLARD, TICHBOURNE, CHARNOCK, and
ABINGDON.*

Boone !—and gentlemen,
Friends, comrades,—nay, all brothers, welcome !

CHARNOCK.

Welcome !

Now, if a man may augur from a look,
Our meeting here should have a happy end,
From yours this morning.

BABINGTON.

Sir, your prophecy
Shall be fulfill'd ; at least, so let us trust.

BALLARD, (*aside.*)

Not quite so fast ; your sunny dawns, they say,
Have tearful endings.

TICHBOURNE.

Prophecy ! a fig !

Give me a stirring hand and a bold heart,
They are the best of augurs. Let's to business.

BABINGTON.

Gentlemen,

Wherefore we meet is known unto you all——

BALLARD.

Pause you a while. They say e'en walls have ears,
And spies, mole-like, can mine beneath our tread ;
I will make sure o' the outer portal, ere
A dangerous breath be breathed.

TICHBOURNE, (*warmly.*)

What !—in this house ?

If treason can couch down with Babington,
Why, then, give up our vain confed'racy.
The world's past mending. If doubt harbours here,
Ours is a needless trouble. Ay, sir—look
Ten thousand meanings if you will, and none
A good one.

BALLARD.

Sir, my meaning's single, plain,
And not unusual. With most politicians,
The quality called Caution, commonly
Is rated at some little, and it's opposite
Is held for dangerous—or, what's worse—suspicious.

TICHBOURNE.

Suspicious?—no—let me contain myself.—
Methinks, sir, 'twere as well to quit this key:
Leave such sage maxims to the needy plotters,
Or stabbers, liquorish of each other's throats,
'Midst whom they were hatch'd. Here, in this company,
There's but one rule, and that well serves for all;
He who doubts here, should be himself suspected.

BALLARD.

Stabbers—suspected—Have I heard aright?
Sure I mistake you, honourable sir.

BABINGTON.

No more. You, Tichbourne, as you are my friend,
Mark me; this hot disruption of our purpose
Is ill—I say that it becomes you not.
Father, methought the spirit of your calling
Chastised your bosom of these humorous pranks

Which in unreverend youth we may excuse,
But scarce in you.

BALLARD, (*aside.*)

Now note this down, my soul;

Insulted, school'd, forget it not—ay, note it;
Brand it here, shame, in burning characters.

(*ALOUD.*)—Oh ! sir, mistake me not ; you say most true ;
The spirit of mine order doth command
To bend to injury. We are but flesh—
Bear with me. I have not forgot my vow.

—'Tis past. See how, before your breath, mine anger
Hath melted like the snow ! Is't not enough ?
If there be more shapes of humility
I must pass through, propose them. I am but
Your scrvant ; and but wait to know what trust
Your honours please to give into my hand,
And so perform it.

BABINGTON.

Sir, this is too lowly—

You are my bosom friend and counsellor,
Nor shall be counted less : no more of this ;
It grieves me more than I shall speak of now.
My friends, this cloud being happily o'erpast,
We will to business.

Wherefore we meet is known unto you all ;
A general wrong needs no interpreter.
Have we not seen the ruin that hath roll'd
O'er our dear country ; Pestilent heresy
Flame like a brand cast in the autumn corn,
Till all the goodly harvest is burn'd up ;
Holy Religion turned to robbery !
Her sacred shrines unroof'd, and made the haunts
Of th' unclean fox and owl ; Penance-worn Age
Chased forth to die beside some bypath ditch ;
And stainless Innocence turn'd loose to shiver,
And starve i' the causeway—Destitution nipt ;
Honour betray'd for of her sister Faith ;
Beauty oppress'd, because she is not false ;
Goodness proscribed, because it will not change ?—
And who have done these things ? not savage Goths,
Who conquer only that themselves are strong,
Who know not light, because themselves are dark ;
But the wolf Lucre, vested like the lamb ;
And bat-like Sophistry, whose filmed eyes
Find day in twilight, and whose leathern wings
Flit ever round the ruins that it loves ;
Amphibious, miscreate ; loathsome alike

To those who crawl, as well as those who soar.
Is this not so? If then, or blood will quench
This fiery pestilence, or fire burn out
The hideous reptiles that infest our fields,
Why should we pause or start? If that your veins
Have ta'en a feverous, or an aguish taint,
Do ye not lance them? If a rabid tooth
Hath torn ye, sear ye not the wound? My friends,
Which of us here shall not do for his country
What for himself he doth?

ABINGDON.

None; none.

TICHBOURNE.

I go,
As far in this as any; only this,
The less of blood the greater is our gain.

CHARNOCK.

The less of blood, the less the devil's gain;
I know not who can gain by them but he.

ABINGDON.

Dost thou love blood?

CHARNOCK.

Sir, no. I love not blood;

But cannot hate their blood who would love mine.

BABINGTON.

Comrades, we shall but shed what blood we must,
And what we *must*, we *ought*.

We are agreed.

Let every hand that's here be join'd with mine.
My friends, ye know that we have deeply sworn
To this, and with our souls impledged our honours,
To stand or fall together. Ye know, too,
That more to knit up this stern brotherhood,
These features are all limn'd ; so, if we fail,
They may know whom to strike ; if we succeed,
They may know whom to praise. Yet, even now,
If any pulse of those I have touch'd here
Beat cold or fearful—I say, even now,
That man is free to go. I would not have
A hand to join me in this enterprize,
That struck not with devotion like mine own.
Doth any answer me ?

BALLARD.

I ask thee this,
Dost thou suspect aught here ?

BABINGTON.

Suspect? no, no!

BALLARD.

Then what but this, God speed our enterprize?

BABINGTON.

Amen, amen. How should we fail, for danger
But makes the brave man firm and confident,
Which gives the coward a vomit. Therefore, Peril
Shall be our handmaid.

We will meet no more,
My friends, until we meet to act. The signal
Of where, and when, ye are possess'd withal.
And now let us disperse. I would not have
My household note too much our conference.
Go not at once, but severally. Good morrow;
Charnock, we'll try your hounds at early dawn.
I'll follow you anon. (*They all go except BALLARD.*)
Stay, Father, I
Would speak with you.

Come nearer to me, Father
And friend—'twould wrong you, did I hide from you
Mine i'most thoughts. Father, you well must know
The purpose that we hold is dangerous;

Most perilous both in the execution
And after-compt; and God knows which of us
In the fell sweep and current of events
May not be stranded. In such exigence
It doth become a man to make provision
Against the worst, that those whose happiness,
Nay, very life, are twined with his, may bide
The separation—if that such must be.
There are two helpless women I would fain,
Whatever be the lot of Babington,
Essay to find some ark for, that may float
Their little fortunes up, if mine be wreck'd—
My mother, and her gentle ward—forgive me,
The heart will fill even though the eyes be dry
Sometimes. One moment's space and I go on—
If we miscarry, you shall haply 'scape.
Your calling doth forbid that you should plunge
Your hands into the blood that must be spilt
At the first threshold of our enterprize—
If it be so—as haply it may be,
Although God speed it other—but if 'tis,
Be you their guardian.

Now I have said,

But do not answer me, I know full well
Thou wouldest be that without hehest of mine,
But 'twas my duty, and we still commend
There where we know our words strike surest root.

BALLARD.

Sir, you may know mine answer—or you should—
Without the aid of any breath of mine.

BABINGTON.

Yet one thing more or ere I go. I think
You are possess'd that Tickbourne loves my ward,
The gentle Agnes, and I could well wish,
For that he is a good and gallant youth,
It were return'd. Let not the little heat
His spirit shew'd to-day make him weigh lighter
In your kind estimation. Happily here
Your council may avail us, for I have mark'd
She holds you in much awe, and knows besides
You are my dearest and most trusted friend
And counsellor.

BALLARD.

If any words of mine
May sway the balance to the side you wish,
Trust me I shall not spare them ; and, meanwhile,

"T'were well I had some brief authority
Under your seal as to the trust wherewith
You please to honour me, but which, please Heaven,
Shall not be wanted.

BABINGTON.

"Tis well thought upon,
You shall have such a document anon.
Its use—Heaven shall direct.

Farewell, dear father.

[BABINGTON goes out.

BALLARD.

The stream, just ere it rushes o'er the cliff,
Runs swiftest; so men, on the brink of ruin,
Seem oft to run into destruction. Fate
Doth film their eyes, and they pull down their death
On their own proper heads.
Yea, 'tis most strange now. She, o'er whom I would
Have most authority, thrust on mine hands
For guardianship—myself too delegated
To plead for him, whose suit I most would blast—
If that events—as some have held—should be
Our chiefest prophets, these speak plainly out.

As dangers thicken, so must acts—and now
One hour determine what the next shall do.

[BALLARD goes out.

SCENE III.

Enter TICHBORNE and PLASKET.

TICHBORNE.

Why, Master Plasket, methinks thy mirth halts more than wont—and thy face, that used to hang out motley on every feature, is changed o' late. Art thou going to leave off trade, that thou takest down thy sign?

PLASKET.

Truly, sir, I am but i'the fashion. Cameleon-like, I even take my colour from that about me; an' if I have left off mirth, it is as I have left off tags—because others have done the like. Marry, I follow the mode, be it in lace or in wit.

TICHBORNE.

Thy wit was never strait-laced. I'll say that for thee; but is this house grown so dull?

*

PLASKET.

Marry, the house is not so dull as the company.

TICHBOURNE.

Still a word-catcher ! Tell me, how long hath this been ?

PLASKET.

How long ? exactly, since Master Boone sojourned
with us.

TICHBOURNE.

Master Boone !—Why is he an enemy to thy cloth ?

PLASKET.

Master Boone is anything but a boon companion, that's
certain ; and methinks he hath infected the rest with the
malady o' mournfulness. The very throstles have left off
whistling.

TICHBOURNE.

Thou lovest not Master Boone ?

PLASKET.

Shall I lie ?—Truly no !

TICHBOURNE.

Come, what object'st thou against him ? There's more
in this than thou givest breath to.

PLASKET.

Nothing. Let him tell me what he is, and then ask my
objections.

TICHBOURNE.

Why, he hath a gentle favour ; hath he not ?

PLASKET.

Like my great grandfather's monument---'tis carved out
o' marble, methinks.

TICHBOURNE.

And a fair presence.

PLASKET.

His absence were better.

TICHBOURNE.

And a good eye.

PLASKET.

I'll see that, when he looks me i'the face.

TICHBOURNE.

And a good wit.

PLASKET.

Let him make me laugh !

TICHBOURNE.

And a thoughtful generosity-----

PLASKET.

I'll say so too, when I get my legacy.

TICHBOURNE.

Psha ! thou carpest and carpest, and yet tell'st nought ;
in a word, What say'st thou to him ?

PLASKET.

Even what he sayeth to me, Nothing.

TICHOEURNE.

Well ; if coldness be a sin, how comes Christmas to be blessed ?

PLASKET.

Sir—as ye cellar up your wines, your meats, and your conserves—so he that is cold hath secrets to keep. Could ye break the ice of his coldness, who knows what foul current runs beneath it !

TICHOEURNE.

I'll hear no more of this. I did not think thou had'st so bitter a vein. Where is the Lady Agnes ?

PLASKET.

Truly, sir, I know not ; but, as I think, in the orchard with my lady. I wou'd ye could make her merrier, for she is even like the rest of us.

TICHOEURNE.

I will make her merry, or she shall go near to make me sad. Master Plasket, fare thee well——

[TICHOEURNE goes out.

PLASKET.

God be wi' ye ; and may ye come back laughing !

This is no phantasy, there's matter in't.
Of late—I know not wherefore—but a gloom
Hath gather'd o'er these roofs, and, since that man
Became their guest, all he hath look'd upon
Hath ta'en a sad complexion from his eye.
There's mystery on his brow—nor do his accents
Sort with his looks. Have I not noted him
Shoot forth a swift glance of intelligence—
Like to an arrow from a leaguer'd wall,
Wing'd to some far-off aid—when he well deem'd
None mark'd him, but the menial that received it.
There was a time such motes would stir me not,
But now when ancient fealty is treason—
When altars are o'erturn'd, and faithful men
Dare hardly ask a blessing on their hearths,
We know not what to trust, nor what to fear—
I will watch well his bearing—

[*He retires.*

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber.*

AGNES alone.—(*She Sings.*)

As the fountain is the purest
When first it meets the day ;
As the breath of Heaven is balmiest
While yet the morn is grey ;
As the gales of Spring are kindlier
Than Summer's noontide heat,
Or the sultry sighs of Autumn—
So first love is most sweet.

Then woe ! and slack ! quoth the damosel,
That grief should come so soon ;
The dews they fall at eventide,
But I have wept at noon ;
The rose that drops at Michaelmas
Hath seen the Summer's sun ;
But Winter overcloudeth me
Or ere my Spring be done.

Do what I will, my fingers only move
As grief would have them, and my notes of joy
Still die into the spirit of a dirge,
As if that Sorrow sat upon the strings
And tuned them to her mood. Do they not say
That Woe can cast her shadow on before
To warn us of her coming ; so the air
Feels still and heavy ere the thunder-crash,
As if the restless and the roving wind
Were struck e'en motionless with very dread,
And terrified to silence. I will sing
No more.

And yet that strain was ever dear to me,
For that 'twas Babington's chief favourite ;
And I would sing it with a sweeter zest
Than I could chant a thousand gayer songs,
Because he begg'd it of me. Now, alas !
He asks for it no more, nor would I hear it
But for his asking.—Go, ungrateful lute,
Thou e'en art like the rest. I love thee not.
E'en like the meadows, or the mossy groves,
Or the hush'd eve, or tuneful nightingale,
Or all that decks the summer, thou could'st please,

But now—can't please no more. Go, plaintive songs ;
Ye may enrapture when the heart is light ;
But, to the sad, your melancholy is
Too near akin to tears.

Enter BALLARD, (Aside.)

She sings—not yet—how beautiful she stands,
As if some seraph had come down to see
How heavenly songs become a mortal lute,
And try if that a wire of earthly mould,
Waked by the touch of a celestial hand,
May make the angels listen—at her voice
My nature is transmuted, as the breath
Driven sweetly through the wreath'd barbaric shell
Doth charm the horned snake. I'll speak to her,
And bask in those meek eyes.—Now, oh ! my bosom
Teem with deceits rife as the sleepy flowers,
In the dank ooze of Lethe ; glide, my words,
Into her ears, like asps, that poison ere
We know that they are there.—

(Aloud.) Heaven bless thee, lady.

AGNES.

Good even, sir—or rather, Father, now
The place permits me say it.

BALLARD.

No—not Father;

That is a title here that fits me not;

And, haply, never shall.

AGNES.

Now, Heaven forefend!

Father, you seem disturb'd.

BALLARD.

I do, dear lady—

Throughout the whole dark volume of my days,

I have been practised as an intercessor

For other men—or at the Throne of Mercy,

Or at those seats where saints above are seated,

Or at some temporal footstool—Never yet

Stood there a true and zealous advocate

So shorn of eloquence, so dumb, so tongue-tied,

As I do now.

AGNES.

This is a marvel; who

Can need your intercession, and with me?

BALLARD.

Who that durst plead as he would wish, dear lady,

But would need intercession.

Pardon me——

I am like one that venturing in to swim,
Ere he hath reach'd mid-current loseth heart,
And idly chokes i' the waters. There are many
Will think to beg a boon, but at the touch,
Sunk by the weight of their unworthiness,
Wreck their own advocacy. Therefore, lady,
If what I say shall seem importunate,
Arrogant, frontless, or unreasonable,
Let me be held but as the mere attorney
Of other men's appeals ; and my commission
Once ended, call myself again your friend.—
It is for Chidiok Tichbourne I would speak.

AGNES.

Why, then, your peroration's thrown away.
It grieves me, Father, thus to break you off;
Ask something, I do pray you, I can grant,
But name not Tichbourne in't, and it shall please me
To run before your wishes.

BALLARD.

Shall't—indeed ?

AGNES.

Do not mistake—I can appreciate

The worth and honour of your noble friend,
But on this theme, I pray you, name him not.

BALLARD.

Your wishes, lady, are omnipotent.

AGNES.

Nay, not so grave ; think me not proud, nor harsh,
Nor one that doth refuse but to be sued,
Nor one that would be sued but to refuse ;
But on this theme, beseech you, pardon me.

BALLARD.

Lady, 'tis I need pardon ; why, methinks
I want the breath to make up such a word.
Do I not know 'tis even with our minds
As with our palates ; and that our mislikings
Will heed no curb of ours ? As 'tis with love,
So with its opposite---'Tis masterless.
What remedy ?---Tichbourne, no doubt, is clear
In spirit and in honour ; gentle ; generous ;
As quick and sparkling as the summer stream,
That ever moves in music. What of that ?
If you can love him not---I am well answer'd.
Though haply there is one to whom his soul
Is as the myrtle to the monarch oak,

Or as the brook to the majestic stream
That rolls mid Indian climes, o'er golden sands,
Half the world's cycle. Bear with me, I grow
Somewhat too florid. Even so—one whose pleasure
Is only daring ; and whose life is danger ;
Whose faith thrives best in perilous extremes ;
Whose honour lies in honourable deeds ;
Who for a nation's good would risk his own.
—On him, perchance, that bosom, though it be
The quintessence of every gentleness,
The bed where love himself dares scarce repose,
Lest he should never leave a couch so soft ;
Slave of his own sweet languor, haply might
Be brought to lean.

AGNES.

Father—I know not this.

There is none such.

BALLARD.

Oh ! say not so, blest creature.

And were I gifted with all things beside,
That Avarice could devise, or Prodigality
Confer, may yon blest light find me no more,
But I would give them all to be that man.

AGNES.

Father !

BALLARD.

Ay, though I roam'd the globe, a naked outcast,
Whom Fate abhor'd, and Fortune had forsown,
So I might count, the while, those eyes the stars
That told my destiny.

AGNES.

What mean you, Father ?

BALLARD.

He that hath drunk new wine in Paradise,
And banquetted upon immortal fruits,
And lived upon the breath that angels breathe,
And tasted of the sleep where Death is not ;
Couch'd 'mid the fadeless amaranthine flowers ;
Not having loved, nor been beloved of thee,
Hath known not what bliss is !

AGNES.

What course is this ?

Your practice, holy sir, should not be false,
Nor yet your words be true—I am unused
To such a tone—much less from such a tongue.

BALLARD.

Hark thee : I'll tell a tale.—Nay, shrink not from me ;
As if or distance had the power to blunt
Th' impressure of thine eyes, or time to heal
The gazer's hurt.—There sometime was a maid,
Named Katharine—ay, De Boria was her name—
Nursed in the German fields, by Wittemberg,
And she did spring the wonder of all eyes,
Till, in her womanhood, her estate of beauty
Might bought the rubied hills of Samarcand,
Ay, or the golden bosom of Peru ;
Rifest of sweets, since our first mother, Eve ;
Save, haply, one : but she, as thou, was humble ;
And all these charms did dedicate to God.
—But not the sanctity of holy walls ;
Nor the heaven-melting breath of choral praise ;
No ; nor the awful shadow of the Cross,
Could drown her accents in one eager ear,
Nor blind the gaze of an unhallow'd eye.
Ay ; for the sake of those rare lineaments,
The sight of which had palsied Phidias' hand,
And hue, at which the roses might outblush
Themselves for envy, God's eternal Faith,

Which heretofore had bound the world, almost
In one unbroken bond of joy and love ;
Even as the silken cincture round that bosom ;
Was torn and trampled on, and made the pandar
Of the fierce passion of that aweless monk,
Who drank his phrenzy from her eyes—his name ?
What was't?—come tell thou me.

AGNES.

I know not, Father.

What mean you?

BALLARD.

Thou dost know—His name was LUTHER !
(He pauses.) What follows upon this? If 'twas per-
mitted—

For evil is *permitted*, even as good—
If 'twas permitted that one fatal face
Should be the cause why sacrilegious hands
Have broken the communion of the Faith,
And bent the very word of God himself,
Unto the impious glosses of bold men,
Who dare cross-question the Redeemer's self,
And make his laws a peg, whereon to hang
Blasphemous cavils—If 'twas so permitted ?

What glory shall be hers who brings the balm
To heal the wound again ? Who would not pledge
Her soul, however priceless, for the hope
Of such a ransom ?—Thou do'st answer not—
Deem that the fate of millions may be set
Upon that brow—thine eyes two constellations
That tell of change and herald destiny.—
Oh ! but methinks that I could foot the waves,
Or pass unscathed into the furnace jaws ;
Yea, live where all created being else
Die ere they can breathe twice—so that this hand
Did point me to the way—Nay, scorn me not,
Nor play the prude with Fate—by Heaven, I'll have't !
—I am not that I seem——

AGNES.

Thou'rt not, indeed !
Unhand me—monstrous and unhallow'd villain—
Methinks the sight of thee e'en doth pollute
The eye that sees.—O ! what a film hath lain
Upon our sight—Hence ! ere that Babington
Hath found that Treach'ry and Ingratitude
Are nestling at his very hearth, to sting him.

—Begone—or ere I breathe what thing thou art—
That mercy I afford thee. (*She is going out.*)

BALLARD.

Yea—So high ?

Why then, I must let fly another falcon.
In faith 'tis time ! I hardly thought that woman
Had been so hard to deal with.

(*He seizes her arm, and leads her back.*) Soft you, lady,
A word or two or ere ye go, and in
Another key, since this doth please you not.
—Sit there—nay, sit, I say—I will be plain,
Since Flattery's out of fashion—Do not tremble—

(*He seats himself at a little distance.*)

Now—what d'ye think me, lady ?

AGNES.

Insolent,

As well as reckless !—of created things,
But tell me which is worst, and thou art worse
Than that—what means this awless violence ?

BALLARD.

Violence !—you wrong me, sweet madam : but he who
rhymes not must prose ; who doth not sing must say !—
A word in your ear, ere you leave me. Thou wilt tell

Babington, wilt thou, lady? deem'st thou I had thrust mine head within the danger of his reproof, if I had him not in the toil? What dost thou think me? thou answer'st not; I will replicate for thee—a Jesuit! whether that be bad, I wot not; but that it is potent—ay, potent, to the very top of potentiality, I know. Now, mark me. Whisper one tittle of these passages between thee and me to human being, and a breath of mine shall make this house a habitation for foxes; and its master food for kites: They shall have a quarter of him for the four points o' the compass. I know the slipperiness of your sex well enough! Beware! One whisper—and—and a swifter and a sadder doom falls upon this house, than was rained on the city Lot pray'd for. I tell thee, there is but a single wag of thy tongue betwixt Babington's neck and the hangman's axe. Remember that—and bite thou thy tongue out, rather than let it ope the door to this secret.—Fare thee well.
(He returns.) One word more. Look, as thou art wont, on Babington, on his mother, on me, on all. No sighings, nor droopings; no brows of insinuation, nor tricks o' th eyelash. I tell thee, wherever thou hast motion, I have eyes; wherever thou hast voice, I have ears; whisper me like Midas' wife but to the reeds, and thou shalt rouse a

snake ! And now, fare thee well ; answer me not ; but—remember,—I say again—remember.

[BALLARD goes out.

AGNES (*looking round fearfully.*)

Yes ; he is gone—Where am I ? Is this so ;
Or hath some swift distemper seized my brain,
And driven it into phrenzy ? I do quiver
Like one just starting from some horrid dream,
Whose fear still deems it real. There are those
They say, in gay but earthquake-shaken climes,
Who in the midst of joy and smilingness
Have seen a sudden gulph yawn at their feet,
Whence darkness seem'd to issue. Such a horror
Is now before me. Merciful powers ! what course—
What way of flight—what method of avoidance
Can save me from th' abyss ? No stay !—no counsel !—
I am as one upon whose sleep a snake
Hath coil'd itself ! I see mine enemy,
But dare not stir to shun him, lest that danger
Be trebled by retreat. What's to be done ?
—Oh ! Babington, in what most perilous mystery
Hath thy high soul embark'd thee ? Let me rally
My scatter'd senses ere I act in this ;

'Then, were my life the guerdon of thy safety,
It should be freely render'd. The mean while,
No womanish weakness shall bewray thy secret,
Though, of all griefs, there is no pang comes nigh
The being grieved—and yet forbid to sigh.

[*She retires.*

SCENE II.—*A Gallery.*

Enter PLASKET and GARDEVIN, meeting.

PLASKET.

Whither so fast, Master Gardevin?

GARDEVIN.

Why, to seek thee and thy betters.

PLASKET.

Thou hast seized the forelock of thine errand.—The latter, peradventure, will be further to seek.—Good journey to thee.

GARDEVIN.

Thou art a mad wag, Master Plasket. Hast thou seen aught of the Lady Agnes?

PLASKET.

I cross'd her even now, i' the Corridor. Seek'st thou her, too?

GARDEVIN.

Marry do I ; she is to go forthwith to her Lady Mother, as she calls her. Sweet young spriglet !—Know'st thou my lord sets forth to-night ?

PLASKET.

What, Babington ?

GARDEVIN.

Ay, and the rest. But I must to my young lady, and then go and brew the stirrup-cup—of all cups, the cup I like the worst, Master Plasket, and yet 'tis good, too.

PLASKET.

When thou brew'st it !—As how ? Thou makest it so strong, the guest getteth not away at all ! Goes Master Boone in their company ?

GARDEVIN.

Ay, marry, doth he.

PLASKET.

Then, hark thee, Master Gardevin ; thou mayest shew the top of thy craft in cup-making. This were the very nick for thee.

GARDEVIN.

Ay, say'st thou ?—as how, Master Plasket ?

PLASKET.

Why, make Master Boone's just potent enough to break his neck by the way.

GARDEVIN.

Aha! thou art a wicked wag.—Well, Heaven mend thee, ere thou break'st thine own neck. I must away to my young lady.

PLASKET.

And I to mine old lady.—God be wi' ye.

[*They go out.*

SCENE III.—*A Chamber.*

Enter BABINGTON and AGNES.

BABINGTON.

Come, gentle Agnes, ere we take to horse,
A careful courier asks for his dispatches.
Tell me what female mission I can carry,
And put to th' executive? What fashion-monger
Or sempstress, at the top o' the town favour,
Have I credentials to? Methought you look'd
As you would speak with me. What, silent still?

Pray Heaven, a letter for the pretty Edith,
Sir Jeffrey's daughter!—Tell me now, in short,
What 'tis that I must do.

AGNES.

Sooth, nothing sir—
Unless it be—not to forget us in
Your absence—nor to make that absence long.

BABINGTON.

Nay, but there's something else.—Come, say it out
Or ere I go.—Time presses.

AGNES.

There is nothing—
Or if there is, I know not how to speak't;
And, were it spoken—'twere but thrown away.

BABINGTON.

And wherefore thrown away? Why, dearest Agnes,
This hath not been your wont. Although your guardian,
I am your friend no less. Come, say your wish
Or ere I go, for go I must—and soon.

AGNES.

Then my request were better left untold—
For, would you bid me ask of you a boon,
'Twere—that you would not go.

BABINGTON, (*much struck.*)

Not go!—

And wherefore?

What superstition's this? Wherefore, dear trembler,
Should I not go?—Why, what should harm me, Agnes?

AGNES.

Nay, that I know not—do not ask me that;
But do not go—oh! not, at least, to-day!

BABINGTON.

At least to-day? and why to-day? is it
My Ides of March?—why, what is in to-day
More than to-morrow, or the next, to that,
Or any other in the calendar,
That I should tarry?—what is there to fear?
Why, Agnes, sure I am an honest man,
And what should harm me, then, on any day,
Or what are days to me?

AGNES.

They should not be.

But in bad times the best are most unsafe,
And Treachery lurks where Innocence doth walk—
Indeed it doth—and, therefore, do not go.

BABINGTON.

Tears, too!—Ah! soft dissembler, I have found it.
These are for Tichbourne.—Have I hit you now?
Nay, there's no need to blush.

AGNES.

Ah! no—no, no!—
If Babington but stay, let Tichbourne go—
I know not what I say—forgive me, sir,
And think me not immodest.—Help me, Heaven,
In this extremity.—(*Aside.*) He's here, great God!
And all is lost!

Enter BALLARD, hastily.

Ha!—hand in hand! Well found,
The loadstone's here.

(*He walks up quickly, and says, markedly,*)

REMEMBER, lady, what
I told you, not long since. Nay, let me not
Make you look serious—but you know they say
“ Long leave-takings make longest absences,
And lightliest parted with comes soonest home.”
(*Aside.*) Tears in her eyes! By Heaven, I like it not,
Yet Babington looks calm and cheerfully.

(*ALOUD.*) So goes the proverb, lady. Honour'd sir,
I came to tell you that our horses wait
E'en now i' the court-yard, and our day wears late.
If't please you now to mount, 'tis two o'clock.

BABINGTON.

I am ready all. Here comes my mother, too.

(*Aside.*) What meant her tears and most unused alarm ?
Whate'er they meant—no matter—'tis too late,
And yet 'twas strange.

Enter the LADY MAUD, TICHBOURNE, CHARNOCK,

PLASKET, &c.

Mother, your hand, if't please you.

(BABINGTON, AGNES, and the LADY MAUD talk
apart.)

BALLARD.

(*Aside.*) I'll watch ye well until ye separate.
Methought the secret trembled on her lips.
On what a precious footing doth he stand,
'Twixt whom and ruin all the barrier is
A woman's constancy ! No more o' your glances ;
They might beseech a saint, or thaw the ice
Of fror'n philosophy. By Heaven, he alters !

BABINGTON, (*coming forward.*)

(*Aside.*) This parting is the hardest task of all !

How fain my heart would be upon my lips.

Down, down, I say—where is my resolution ?

(*ALOUD.*) Madam, or ere I go, it is but fit

I crave your blessing ; and, next after that,

Your best commands and motherly direction.

LADY MAUD.

Thou hast it, son. And, for advice of mine,

My sole direction is thy nurture. As

Thou hast been educate, so wilt thou act,

And that was after goodness still, and honour,

And all that may become a Babington.—

Thou hast not told me when thou shalt return.

BALLARD.

(*Aside.*) Never. I'll wager six to one on't ! He changes again. Keep your Basilisk eyes off him, madam, you had best !

BABINGTON.

In some few days, perhaps—or, at the least,

Such is my purpose.

LADY MAUD.

Nay, nay ; look not grave :

Far be it from me to limit your sojourn.
My son shall make return e'en when he can ;
I ask no more.

BALLARD.

(*Aside.*) You had better not, seeing the business we have in hand. Still watching him ! By St Loyola, I'll spoil this ogling !

BABINGTON.

Madam, I bid farewell :
And farewell all. (*To AGNES.*)
You shall be merrier
When we return.

TICHBOURNE.

I hope sir, and she shall.

BALLARD.

(*Aside.*) Oh ! well put in, Master Malapert !

TICHBOURNE.

Lady, an if I thought your sadness were
Because I went, in sooth I were less sad :
And so, farewell.

BABINGTON.

Come, Tichbourne, come at once ;
Farewell to all.

BALLARD.

Farewell, mine honoured lady.

[BABINGTON, TICHBOURNE, CHARNOCK, and
BALLARD, go.

AGNES, (*rushing hastily out.*)

He's gone, and I shall hear that voice no more.

LADY MAUD.

Why, Agnes, whither would'st thou ?

AGNES, (*much agitated.*)

Pardon me.—

To the south turret, madam. I would fain—

See them—take horse.

[*She goes out.*

LADY MAUD.

Hark, Plasket ; when thou hast
Seen thy lord mount, bring Agnes to my chamber ;
And pr'ythee, try devise some means of mirth.
Of late, poor thing, I've mark'd her melancholy,
And her tongue's music sadly hath declined
To a most speaking silence. She must have
Some change of mirth and converse. What it is
I know not—but there's somewhat preys upon her.
Pr'ythee, be gone.

PLASKET.

I shall obey you, madam.

At least, I'll do my best.

(*Aside.*) Hard task to smile,
When the eye droops, and the heart bleeds the while.

[*They go out.*

SCENE IV.—*An Apartment.*

Enter WALSINGHAM and GIFFORD, hastily.

WALSINGHAM.

Mark me, I say. This issue is the last.
If 'tis thine errand to equivocate,
To shuffle, and put forth mysterious riddles,
Thy time's gone by. Speak out, knave, at thy peril!

GIFFORD.

My lord—my lord!—

WALSINGHAM.

Thou sayest there is a foul conspiracy,
And that thou sayest sooth, I well believe.
Name the conspirators—or be content
To pass for one thyself. I will just give thee
Five minutes, for confession, or the rack.

GIFFORD.

My lord, they shall be named, though not by me.

WALSINGHAM.

By whom, then ?

GIFFORD.

By my master.

WALSINGHAM.

Who is he ?

GIFFORD.

I know not.

WALSINGHAM.

Where is he ?

GIFFORD.

I know not.—But

I know where he shall be within six hours.

WALSINGHAM.

Where ?

GIFFORD.

Here !

WALSINGHAM.

This subterfuge shall not avail thee.

This is a train to ope thy passage out :

It shall not help thee. If that thou canst sink

E'en like a spirit, through the impassable stone,
Or make the bolts and bars leap at thy bidding,
Then thou shalt go. If not, thou may'st remain.
—Within, there !

GIFFORD.

Hush ! my lord. Hush ! Will you mar all for a minute's impatience ? Bolts ! keep your fangs upon me, and welcome. Set me i' the stocks an you will, only grant that which I ask. It is my last request, my lord—save one—and that, I trow, ye'll grant without the asking, if a saved throat may ensure gratitude.

WALSINGHAM.

Then, sirrah ! should'st thou grateful be, indeed,
That I have saved thee thus far from the gallows.
But now thine hour is come. Speak out, or—hang !

GIFFORD.

Sir, I will be plain with you. 'Tis my cue. I wish not to escape your custody. Give me the escort of a troop of horse. Let them take me whither I choose to go. 'Tis but a ten hours' journey ; and if ye be not satisfied ere I return, let one of your men-at-arms unlace me like a cooney, with his toledan for a carving-knife.

WALSINGHAM.

Whither would'st thou go?

GIFFORD.

To the vipers' nest. In ten hours will I bring ye what they have been these ten months a hatching ; and, ere I return, ye shall have every head of them on Temple-Bar, if ye like. Read that, sir. (*Giving a paper.*)

WALSINGHAM.

A sealed packet!—What is it?

GIFFORD.

It shall tell you what my master is, though I know it not myself. Now, will ye let me begone?

WALSINGHAM.

I am satisfied.—Within there, Sir Amias.

Enter SIR AMIAS PAULET.

Saddle a squadron of your chiefest horse,
And take the guidance of this gentleman ;
But, ere ye go, send orders to Lord Pembroke,
Between this and to-morrow, to post troops
Upon the road to Fotheringay. Instruct him
To be alert ; the time is full of peril.
Begone—Come back—Give orders to the sentinels,

Whoever asks admittance at the hour
Writ on this paper, bring him to me straight,
And ask no questions.

SIR AMIAS.

I shall do't, my lord.

[SIR AMIAS and GIFFORD go.

WALSINGHAM.

Even as a man that yields a two-edged sword
Will oft-times wound himself; were treason not
A traitor to himself, what state could stand
The shot of his fell malice? Yet, what's treason?
A game by passion and by envy play'd
Against the winner, losing which, he doubles
The odds, then plays again.

Mistaken men!

As for this coil in hand, their culverin,
So cunningly though levell'd, e'en shall burst
With th' venom of its loading, and so mar
The hand that pointed. I must in to council.
It must be look'd to.

[He retires.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Chamber.***AGNES and the LADY MAUD.***AGNES touches a lute, and lays it down again.***LADY MAUD.**

Are the chords false, that thou dost scorn them so,
Or is't thy heart that hath grown out of tune,
And so thy fingers falsify the strings,
Which yet are true, through thine distemperature ?
Why, Agnes, did the merry Tichbourne see
These drooping eye-lids, they should almost fright
The spirit of his truth—and that were ill—
For, by my troth, he wears a true light heart.

AGNES.

Too lightly worn to wear well, haply, madam.

LADY MAUD.

Too lightly worn to wear well, haply, madam !
Why, lightliest worn for ever wears the longest.
Now this is the true spirit of misrule.
And so, because thou know'st he loves not grief,
Thou'l do thy best to fall in love with it.

AGNES.

Nay, madam, you have grown in love with mirth,
And of the sudden—for 'tis all o' late—
And yet I marvel at it, for methinks
Your son is none of those same nimble tongues ;
And surely you'd not undervalue him.

LADY MAUD.

No, Agnes, no ; a mother's fondness doubled,
If double of a mother's love could be,
Were not too much for him—yet is he grave,
Too grave, methinks, for many ladies' love,
Who cannot find desert, unless it be
Bloom'd o'er with smiles, and wreathed with many mirths,
As if it were the garland made the May.

AGNES.

The eagle, when he soars towards the sun,
Is blind to specks beneath ; and, lofty souls,

Whose aspirations rise a higher pitch,
Stoop not to mingle with the petty crowd
That keep the surface, and fret to and fro,
Full of the little business of the world.
Strong minds are ever difficult to move,
And, most of all, to laughter or disport ;
Such is the gravity of Babington.

LADY MAUD.

Agnes, thou still wast partial in his praise ;
But tell me, think'st thou Babington ambitious ?

AGNES.

Pardon me, madam—no.

LADY MAUD.

Nay, blush not, Agnes ;
Thou dost mistake me. All my drift was this ;
Think'st thou his mind superior to his state ?

AGNES.

Methinks his mind is *better* than his state,
And would be so, whate'er that state might be.

LADY MAUD.

But dost thou think distinction is his aim ?

AGNES.

Virtuous distinction, madam ; noble toil
Surely he would prefer to recreant ease.

LADY MAUD.

In truth, he hath been lofty from a child,
And e'en his boyish pastimes relish'd still
Of a minute and honourable pride :
I have observed it oft.

AGNES.

Oh ! doubtless, madam.

I well remember, in our infancy,
When each would have a favourite plant or flower,
He loved the wall-flower most, because it roots
Itself the highest, and can brave the blast,
And climb the rifted rock, or time-worn tower ;
And he would praise the holly, for it smiled
Despite the frown of winter, as the bold
Can live and flourish in adversity.

LADY MAUD.

And say, which was my Agnes' favourite flower ?

AGNES.

In sooth I know not, madam—or perchance
I have forgotten—’tis so long ago.
Yet do not think but Babington is kind
For all this prattle. I have seen him weep
O'er a wild air, brought from the Scottish hills,—

A simple soothing air, but which they say
Rizzio once sung to falling majesty,
As if his very soul died with the strain
Dissolved in music, as the summer mists
Melt in the first tide of the tender dawn.
It told of purple hills, and forests green,
Embosom'd lakes, and odour-breathing flowers,
And buds just oped, and sunny streams that glitter'd
And danced i'the early ray—now distant far,
And seen, alas ! no more. In sooth, 'twas sweet,
And I did weep with him, nor ever knew
How melody spoke till then.

Nay, chide me not,
I could not choose but weep. Good truth, it moved me
As it had waken'd a new pulse of life
That never beat before. Nay, frown not, madam.

LADY MAUD.

I do not frown ; but thou givest up thyself
Too much unto these fanciful conceits,
Born of imagination, which hath not
Whereon to diet, and will therefore make
Food for itself. What would'st thou say, dear girl ?

AGNES.

What plant is that, which being only touch'd
Or look'd upon with an ungentle gaze,
Doth wither straight, and die?

LADY MAUD.

I know not, child;
Why dost thou ask?

AGNES.

Only because methinks
That plant should ever bloom the best with me.

LADY MAUD.

Why, Agnes, Agnes, this is childishness.

AGNES.

Dear mother!

LADY MAUD.

Sooth, I must be sharp with you.

AGNES.

Be what you please, and say what I must be,
And I am that, dear madam;—only love me,
And be “my mother” still.

LADY MAUD.

I am, dear girl.

Take now thy lute, and breathe some simple air,
May help us to forget this foolish talk.

AGNES.

Madam, I shall. There is a little air
This many a day hath hung about my lute,
As if some spirit had o'erswept the strings,
And tuned them to his fantasy.—"Tis sweet,
But melancholy.—Shall I sing it, madam ?

LADY MAUD.

E'en as thou wilt, dear child, so that thou sing'st.

AGNES Sings.

The changeful Moon may trim her lamp,
And the nightingale may mourn ;
Beneath her beams, so cold and damp,
My love shall not return ;
But when her blunted horn shall wane,
And her beams wax pale and dim,
My true love shall wend back again ;
The day-star shines for him.

The pale cold Moon she trimm'd her lamp,
And the nightingale complain'd ;
And the night-bird scream'd, in the forest swamp,
When Walter's steed was rein'd ;

And the spectre-fire in the thickets gleam'd,
And flitted blue and dim ;
And only stood where it met with blood—
No day-star rose for him.

Fair Alice long in her tow'r may stay,
And cast her eyes afar,
And bid God speed him on his way,
And watch the morning-star.
The Moon she left the lowering skies,
And the morn-beam rose in vain,
And the day and the night have heard her cries ;
He never came again.

LADY MAUD.

Why this, methinks, is sadness' very self.

AGNES.

'Tis from the heart, dear mother, and they say
Music, e'en like discourse, should still be child
O' th' heart, or else 'tis nothing.

Plasket, welcome.

Enter PLASKET.

LADY MAUD.

Now, Plasket, what's the newest folly stirring ?

PLASKET.

None so new, my lady, but that 'tis old enough ; and

none so old, but that it comes with a new face, fashion-changed; e'en like our dames o' quality; of whom the oldest hath haply the newest complexion !

LADY MAUD.

A riddle ! what's this folly that thou talk'st of ?

PLASKET.

'Tis a new gift, as easy as fortune-telling, and not quite so ticklish. Marry, 'tis the faculty of seeing what is not to be seen, and hearing what is not to be heard. A goodly accomplishment ! and right likely to thrive !

LADY MAUD.

What foolery's this, good Plasket ?

PLASKET.

You may say so—Here's a bumpkin, this morning, will swear you the Baron's chapel, last night, was lighted up, as for a death solemnity, and that he heard airy voices chanting the requiem !

AGNES.

What dost thou say ? strange music heard i'the night ?
—did'st thou hear aught ?

PLASKET.

Truly, not I—had it been the music o' the spheres !

Snoring is all my concert till cock-crowing—unless the wind sing i' the chimney, as it did last night.

AGNES.

This is but fooling.

(Anxiously.) Didst thou hear nought else?

PLASKET.

Not I, sweet lady.

LADY MAUD.

Wherefore should he, Agnes?

What fancy's this?

AGNES.

No fancy!—I, too, heard it.

LADY MAUD.

What did'st thou hear?

AGNES.

A solemn strain of music,
That mingled with the wind. Methought it floated
And plain'd around the turrets of the house,
Despite the surging air.

LADY MAUD.

This was some dream.

AGNES.

It was no dream.—Your clear and living voices
Are not more palpable.

Enter a SERVANT, hastily.

PLASKET.

How now? thou sweat'st
As if thou hadst drunk hyssop!

SERVANT.

Honour'd lady,
I come to say, a troop of horsemen spur
Fast up the avenue. Is it your pleasure
The gates be barr'd?

LADY MAUD.

A troop of horsemen say'st thou?
Arm'd?

SERVANT.

Arm'd, my lady.

LADY MAUD.

Let the gates be closed,
If but for ceremony. [The SERVANT goes out.

Plasket, go
Up to the turret, and of what thou see'st
Bring back report. No; stay. What needs this stir,
Because an armed troop point at my gate?
What is there we should fear? We are strong enough

To shut out lawless violence ; and within
The range of any that the law can sanction,
God knows, we stand not.

(Knocking heard.) They are here already.
Now, Gardevin ?

Enter GARDEVIN.

GARDEVIN.

An armed troop, my lady,
Are at the gate, and in the Queen's name seek
Straightway admittance.

LADY MAUD.

Did'st thou ask their mission ?

GARDEVIN.

I did, my lady ; but their leader bade me
To ope our gates forthwith, without more parley,
Nor deign'd to speak aught else.

LADY MAUD.

So peremptory !

In the Queen's name ? what means this visitation ?
No matter.—Let the gates be oped at once ;
The guilty fear—not we. [GARDEVIN retires.

Why dost thou tremble ?
What dost thou fear ?

AGNES.

I know not what I fear—
But feel a formless horror creep around me,
That makes me tremble, as the viewless wind
Doth shake the aspen.

LADY MAUD.

This is weakness ; fie !

AGNES.

It is—I know it is—pardon me, mother ;—
'Tis but a passing shade, and will away—
What have the innocent to dread ?

They are here—

Great God !—oh ! now be my forebodings false,
For this is fear enough.

Enter SIR AMIAS PAULET, GIFFORD, and Soldiers.

SIR AMIAS.

Lady—mine office,
Believe't, I would had not been laid upon me,
For 'tis most painful.

LADY MAUD.

Say, what is it, sir ?

SIR AMIAS.

By the Queen's order, through her privy council,
It is commanded me to seize this house,
And all that it contains.

LADY MAUD.

To seize this house !

On what pretence ?

SIR AMIAS.

Upon a sworn charge, lady,
And no pretence, although I would 'twere not so—
For that it harbours traitors.

LADY MAUD.

Traitors ! whom ?

What traitors ?—Surely ye do know our name,
That come thus banded to despoil our house,—
And when lodged treason with a Babington ?

GIFFORD.

When, say ye ? marry, an't please your ladyship, within these ten hours !—Hark ye, captain ; parley no further ; 'tis lost breath. Let your myrmidons ransack the house. 'Tis worth your while ; and for treason—in this very room will I shew ye, i'the nonce, the very faces of the traitors, and these, too, of their own limning. You stare.

There's a device here, my masters, ye wot not of. Mark ye, now—ay ; here 'tis. Mark ye, now ! so ; there : Back pannel, and behold.—(*He touches a spring, the pannel slides back, and discovers a painting of the conspirators.*) Welcome, gentlemen, from behind your wooden veil. Faith ! ye shew rarely—a precious parterre for the liquorish eyes of Bothwell's Mary !—“ QUORSUM HEC ALIO PROPERANTIBUS ?”—A goodly motto for men going post-haste to the gibbet ! Know ye any here, sweet ladies ?

AGNES.

(*Rushes to the picture and screams.*) Ah ! Babington !

LADY MAUD.

Where, where ?—mine eyes are dim—

What do ye point at ?—traitor ? sir ; no, no.

There is some likeness e'en 'twixt Heav'n and Hell !

It is some gin of wicked treachery—

I say, it is not he—it is not Babington—

No son—no child—of mine——

[*She faints.*

AGNES.

Oh ! ye have kill'd her.

SIR AMIAS.

Support her, there, poor lady. Let us mingle

Pity with duty. Go, search every chamber
Throughout the house.—

Stay—doth this ashen hue;
Argue the life burnt out? or the weak spirits,
Ta'en with a sudden fear at this dire news,
Shrink back to their recesses—doth she not breathe?
Your arm—here—harden'd monk! Gently, good fellow,
There—bear her gently up.

[*As they raise her, the scene closes.*

SCENE II.—*A mean Apartment in a House in London.*

AGNES alone.

Darkness draws on—Hath not the ruthful day
Sunk faster than his wont from out the sky,
Because he would not look upon our tears?
—Yet am I calm—Methinks, these gentle elves,
(If, as they tell, such are our guardians,)
That love the ripple of the moonlight sea;
Or silver bosom of the sleeping lake;
Or stilly grot that shades some sacred spring,
Or rest mid myrtle groves, where no leaf stirs,

On woven beds of languid odour'd flowers,
 Have left their haunts, thus to o'ersway my senses.
 —Whence comes this calmness else?

Oh! Babington,

Have I not drank from thy beloved eyes
 Some of their high resolve mix'd with their softness?
 Methinks I am with thee still, and still shall be,
 And therefore do I sink not—There's a shore
 Beyond this troublous sea, where we shall rest;—
 So sorrow loves to dream.—Is it not so?
 I have heard that men, deep bowell'd in the earth,
 Can see the stars at mid-day—even so grief,
 When we are deepest plunged in the abyss,
 Points to the world beyond, and heavy eyes
 See clearest through their tears.

What was that noise?
 A footstep sure—It is—He comes, and all
 Is over, ere 'tis spoken.

Enter PLASKET.

Thou hang'st back,
 As if a freight of grief did clog thy steps.—
 Whate'er thou say'st say quickly—out! slack!

Methinks thy speech is figured in thine eye ;
And both are full of death.

PLASKET.

Compose yourself,
Beseech you, dearest lady.

AGNES.

Is there none—
No hope ? no stay ? no way of refuge left ?
Their youth—their early time—the subtle poison
Wherewith that fiendish traitor blinded them,
Might plead to let them live ; but only breathe ;
No matter how, or where.

PLASKET.

I pray you, madam,
Call up your fortitude to bear what must be.
Alas ! too sure, there is no hope.

AGNES.

Oh God !
How is it that presentiments of blessing
So oft are vain, and presages of horror
Be ever more fulfilled ?

PLASKET.

Madam, be calm,
Beseech you—

AGNES.

I am calm—I have been calm—
 Yet who can choose but shrink whom the red brand
 Hath dazzled almost blind ? 'Tis over now—
 Speak to me—tell me what hath pass'd—fear not.
 Now I am calm enough. Do ye not see ?
 Look on my hand—methinks it trembles not.

(She holds out a miniature.)

Mark ye—Thou know'st that brow ? 'Tis Babington's.
 In the fell shock and agony of his fate,
 Did he look aught like this ?

PLASKET.

Madam, he did.
 Nor did his cheek blench colour. When his judges
 Did tell him he must die, he answer'd calmly,
 " He did not fear to die. Had he fear'd that,
 He had not then stood there."

AGNÉS.

Thank God!—Thank God !
 And how beseem'd the rest ?

PLASKET.

Even as he did.
 Little they said, all save the gallant Tichbourne,

Who, being ask'd, why he did join himself
To such companionship? with brow and eyes
Where indignation lighten'd, scornfully
Replied—" For company!"

What heard you, madam?

AGNES.

What noise was that?

PLASKET.

Madam, I did hear none.

AGNES.

Again!—'Tis nearer now.—Heard'st thou not that?
They drag them to their death-cells through the streets!
Sweet Heav'ns, support me now.

(*Shouts drawing nearer.*)

If that thou canst,
Look forth, I pray, and tell me what thou see'st.
My limbs are powerless!—I am dead already—
If that we can die all but our despair.
Great God! 'tis Babington.—Support him, Heavens,
And let me not faint yet—not yet—not yet!

(*Shouts.*)

And yet my heart, that even dies within me,
Only to think of what I dare not look on,

Doth almost burst its worthless tenement,
As that, perforce, it would be out of doors,
Despite its coward mistress.

(*A very loud shout. Agnes screams.*)

Plasket, speak!—

Why dost thou hide thine eyes thus with thy hands?
It is the savage throng have murder'd him!
Speak—speak—for mercy's sake!

PLASKET.

It is past now;—

I could not bear to see the cruel herd
Heap contumelies on his dying head,
And mock the patience of his gentleness.
Stir not, dear lady. Oh! beseech ye, stir not,
It is a needless pang, and there's enough
Of cruelty already. I beseech ye,
Be patient now.

AGNES.

Yes I am calm.—'Tis past.

Thou see'st that I am firm; and, were I not,
How should I bear that which is yet to come?
I would not die before him, if I might.
There is yet much to do—Oh! much.—How much?
And in how brief a time?—What agonies,

Tearings of heart-strings, mortal throbs o' the bosom,
Must make the business of a few short hours ?
I must act now—whatever pangs await,
They must not kill me in the thinking of ;
Beyond, I care not.

Plasket, if thou lovest me,
And for his sake, whilom who was thy master,
Wait on my bidding through these lonely minutes,
And find thy guerdon in his memory—
A sad but sweet one.

PLASKET.

Can'st thou doubt me, lady ?

AGNES.

Why, then, attend me—whither I would go.

PLASKET.

And whither would'st thou go, sweet lady ? Where
Can'st thou find aught that will not ope those wounds
Which bleed too fresh already ?

AGNES.

I would go—

Where Babington is chain'd—attend me there.

PLASKET.

Alack ! alack !—This is delirium ;

Believe't it is, dear lady. It would kill thee
Only to look upon't.

AGNES.

(*Firmly.*) Thou know'st me not.
Thou art most ignorant of a woman's strength
When she doth struggle but with sufferance.
I tell thee it shall float me through these sorrows,
Meek as the wounded sea-bird on the waters.—
But only let me look on Babington.

PLASKET.

Lady, where'er thou goest, I will attend thee
To my last breath. God strengthen thee, and guide thee.

AGNES.

Then tarry here one moment, and we go.

[*She goes out.*

PLASKET.

Poor broken heart. This is the desperate strength
That madmen wot of, and which dying men
Oft make the prelude of their agony.
Thus, out of very weakness cometh power—
As sorrow often is the child of joy ;
And those who seem the most unlike the rest,
Are levell'd still by contrarieties

Down to the common measure of our breath.
For what is life? Is't not to be deceived?
To struggle still for what we never gain,
And when we think we gain it, lose it most.
To pine—alike in splendour or in gloom—
To find the ore of virtue can but buy
Ingratitude—or else to sell our souls,
And give the jewel for some tinsell'd cheat—
Or being happy to be still betray'd,
Until content shall wane into distrust,
And mortal bliss shew like a hollow pageant,
Splendid as autumn, and as full of death.
I, that have still o'erburthen'd my poor wit
To fasten scorns upon this coil of ours,
Begin to see at last my labour lost.
I too have been at fault—e'en like the rest—
And find, in truth, life is a bitter jest,
Which needed not my botching—

AGNES enters veiled.

Save you, lady;

I wait upon your leisure—Whither you would,
Thither I follow you.

AGNES.

Then let us go ;
Fate beckons, and Despair shall not say no.

[*They go out.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*An Apartment in the Tower.*

BABINGTON alone. *He starts from his couch.*

Ha ! burn the stars not dim ?—What is the hour ?
Surely, methought, I heard the midnight toll.
Wild fantasies spring in the troubled breast
As meteors from the fen. Did I not dream
I saw my mother married ; and she stood
Deck'd for the bridal in her winding sheet ?—
—The tapers flicker'd bluely—and, e'en yet,
The choral voices ring within mine ear !
Methought they issued from the vaults below,
And not the holy choir ; and, when they ceased,
Died into sounds unearthly—horrible—
That were not music—'Twas a ghastly dream—
I'll walk and watch awhile to calm myself.

This is the time, when round a wretch like me,
Will hover those ill beings, whose bad pastime
Is human ruin—such as crowd, they say,
To new-made graves ; or, like a wandering fire,
Flit round the spot where murder hath made feast ;
Or shroud them in the cloud, whose smouldering bolt
Hath struck to earth the thunder-blacken'd wretch ;
Or, with unnatural fears and fiendish promptings,
Infect the restless sleep of those who wake
To suicide.—

Doth not the lamp wax pale ? sure morning nears.
Well ; let it come. Haply they think to scare me
By bringing death o' the sudden 'fore my face,
As they would fright a child. 'Tis baffled malice.
Had not his visage been familiar to me,
I had not been thus. I am now calm again
As yesternight, when at my grated window
I watch'd the sun go down, lovely as e'er
He did in happier days—ere I knew sorrow,
Yet did not shed one tear. Let them deny
A friendly voice to smooth my waning hours,
And work my death with more of cruelty,
And less of sympathy, than they'd bestow

Upon a thievish cur—I can bear all.
Nor shall a dying eye, 'mid all their tortures,
Ask, “ How can ye do this ? ”

How now ?

Enter GAOLER.

I come

To say that one would be admitted to you.

BABINGTON.

One ? Who ?

GAOLER.

She will not say her name.

BABINGTON.

Her name !

Admit her straight, whoe'er she be ; and who
That bears a woman's heart, can seek this den
At such an hour as this ?

[GAOLER retires.

Enter AGNES.

Whoe'er thou art,

That in an hour when others would forget,
Dost think of Babington—Welcome ; and, lady,

Let me in pity see one face whereon
Sure pity must be writ.

Look down, ye powers,
Sure I do know this hand. Oh speak ! unveil !
That I may know what I must yet endure.

AGNES.

(Faintly.) Babington !

BABINGTON.

Agnes, speak ! Alas ! she's pale
As death were on her brow. What ! have they sent thee
That it might kill thee, and thine innocent breath
Be added to my debt.

Look up, dear saint,
Unless I may die too.

AGNES.

Where am I ?—Babington !

I shall be strong anon. 'Tis past ; forgive me
If, when I look'd upon this place, my heart
Did die within me—but forgive me, sir,
It was a woman's weakness.

BABINGTON.

Thou art all good—

But who did guard thee here? Why would'st thou come?
This is no place for gentleness like thine.

AGNES.

Ask'st thou who guarded hither, Babington?
Heaven! Wherfore I would come, oh ask me not!—

BABINGTON.

And wherfore not, dear child?

AGNES.

(*Solemnly.*) Because that wherfore
Is nothing now either to thee or me.—
No breath hath ever known't, and, therefore, henceforth,
Let it remain unbreathed, till breath goes too—
God grant not long—no matter. Only say
My presence comforts you—say, that to see me,
Or hear my voice, gives but a single ray
Unto the darkness of extremity;—
Then you are answer'd, why I would come here.

BABINGTON.

Comfort me!—yea, I am amazed, blest creature,
Wrapt and uplifted, at the very thought
That excellence like thine should dare these horrors
For my poor—ruin'd sake. O! I do see
A glimpse—a ray, to which I have been blind,

Even like the fool, that gazing at the sun
O'ertrod the precious jewel at his feet.—
Look down, great God ! But one half hour ago,
The name of comfort to my loneliness
Were as a very echo, but the shadow
Of that which in itself was scarce a sound.
—Oh ! what an hour of contrarieties !
Speak to me, Agnes.

AGNES.

And what should I say ?

What contrarieties ?

BABINGTON.

Ay, what indeed ?

Time is too short, e'en to o'errun them now.
To seek for love, there, where it might not be ;
And to o'erpass it, there, where it hath been ;
To live long, watching hope which ne'er could bloom ;
To die, with hope unlook'd for, yet fulfill'd,—
Is't not an hour of contrariety ?

Answer me Agnes, is it not ?

AGNES.

Oh ! what—

What can I answer ?

BABINGTON.

What can'st thou, indeed ?

Nor would I have thee. Only answer this,
Ere darkness hath made vain the utterance—
—Dost thou not love me ?

See how forward, Fate
Can make a reckless wretch.

AGNES.

Let my tears fall—
Believe me they are cold. Yes ! I *have* loved thee ;
That is the word,—and will—thy memory.

BABINGTON.

I die content. I will not utter more ;
Fate and the hour forbid. I must not take
Those thoughts that should be God's, not even to give
them
To thee. So be't. Yet never, therefore, deem
That priceless love hath all been cast away.
Half of my life thou hast preserved, which else,
Alas ! perchance had died.—List to me, Agnes,
I do bequeath thee a dear legacy,
A rich one—for my sake, oh ! cherish it !
My mother—

Ha ! why has thy colour fled ?
What spell enchains thine utterance ? what is this ?
Thou shudderest—as if thine eyes could see
The hell that's here. Agnes, my blood is curdling—
My heart is shrunken up, as by fierce fire,
Even at my horrible imaginings ;
Before its strings have snapp'd, speak but one word—
Although its sound shall be too desolate,
Ev'n for the fiends to laugh at. Thou speak'st not,
But turn'st away thy face, and wring'st my hand.
I'll say it for thee then—My mother's dead !
Sign to me ; is't not so ?—Hold up, my heart ;
This is thy latest pang.—My mother—dead ?
(Passionately.) And wherefore should she live ? is it not
better
That her old eyes are blinded in the dust,
Than left to be put out by sights like this ?
Thank God. For her 'tis better, how'er Heaven
May judge for me. Unto this latest trial,
As unto all gone, or that yet may come,
I bow—'Tis o'er—thank God !

Enter GAOLER.

How now ! what would ye ?

GAOLER.

The time is over which is meted out
For such a conference.

BABINGTON.

But one half hour more,

And it is ended.

GAOLER.

Sir, it pities me,
For that mine orders are most peremptory.
I cannot dare to do what fain I would.

BABINGTON.

What ! would ye tear my heart out ere my time ?
I tell thee, fellow, were thy masters here,
Methinks a sight like this might move e'en them,
Not to molest my few, short, ending hours.

GAOLER.

Sir, I shall wait here for a half hour more,
But, trust me, at my peril.

BABINGTON.

I'll not betray thee ;

A traitor as I am.

[*The GAOLER retires.*

Oh ! how time flies—

E'en to the wretched, when they'd have him stay.
Agnes, we must be brief. With iron hand
Fate tears our hearts asunder. We must part ;
And let me part as doth become a man.
Oh ! could I crowd into a few sad minutes,
A smiling summer's day, I might say much—
Much ! ah ! how much ! Let me quit that. I know not,
Why thou hast loved a wretch, whose dazzled sight,
Blind with a fatal passion, hath betray'd
His steps into destruction—I know't not—
Unless that extreme coldness, as they say,
Can burn like fire. It is enough for me,
To feel what thou hast given, and I have lost.
Let it be comfort yet, that thine affection
Is so far happy, that it brings to me
One beautiful recollection, which shall gild
My passage. It shall dwell on thee in dying,
And smile away my pain.

(*A distant bell tolls.*)

Our hour is come.—

Oh ! let us part as those alone should part
With nothing of remorse, and therefore nothing

Of fear. 'Tis fit we should be firm, my Agnes,
Who are unfortunate, but innocent.
Malice may gnaw my name ; but thou shalt know
I gave my breath but for my country's weal.
This is the last ; and we must say—farewell !

AGNES.

No—not farewell ! Say not farewell ; we may
Meet ONCE again ; thou see'st how firm I am.

BABINGTON.

No ! not again—not again !

Beseech thee, do not
Breathe such a thought. Wast thou all angel, yet
Thy ministry ends here. What is to come,
No eye should see, save ONE above—and THIERS !—
Hear my last blessings—but before I breathe them,
Gaze for one passing moment in my face.—
Now turn away those eyes. They do awake
Thoughts—oh ! too sweet not to be alien
To such an hour as this. Give me thine hand,
And when I say farewell, leave me at once.
Thy hand—not yet—be firm, and tremble not.

(He puts a ring on her finger.)

Wear this, dear saint, for Babington's poor sake,

And let it wed thee to his memory.
Live thou to think that, dying, he was thine ;
And shall be thine again !

And now to Heaven,
Where, let me humbly hope I shall soon be,
I do commend thine innocence. God keep thee ;
God watch o'er thee—support thee—guard thee—save thee ;
And, ere my voice is choken, and my tongue
Doth lose its office—oh ! farewell ! farewell !
Heaven bless thee ! oh ! Heaven bless thee !

(*She runs out.*)

The last string
Is crack'd at length, that held me to the world ;
And welcome, death and darkness.

[*The scene closes.*

SCENE II. *A Street in London.*

Enter BALLARD and GIFFORD, meeting.

BALLARD.

Why do I meet thee here ?

GIFFORD.

I did not know
That 'twas my cue to have avoided thee.

BALLARD.

Not so. Thou dost mistake; I sought thee rather.
Why should I walk here but in quest of thee?
Think'st thou I come to look at fools, who make
Blood pastime, but not gain? What is thy news?
What hast thou done? where hast thou been? thou'rt pale.
Say quickly.

GIFFORD.

I have been where Babington
Gave up his life.

BALLARD.

Art thou a connoisseur
In death, e'en like the rest? would'st thou enact
The lurcher wholly, and lap up the blood
Thou helpest to betray?—Fool! and for this
Darest thou neglect what I have given in charge?
If that thou hast—

GIFFORD.

I have not. She is traced,
At least I think it.

BALLARD.

Traced?—whither, and how?

GIFFORD.

Thither where I have been. List to me, sir;
If I am pale, 'tis that I've seen a sight
Which drove the blood back to my very heart,
That almost bled for pity. Why I went
Where Babington and his unhappy mates
Shook gory hands with death, needs not to tell.

BALLARD.

I ask'd thee not—nor do I ask thee now—
For tedious pity, however new to thee.
What did'st thou see?

GIFFORD.

I saw the noble Babington
Stand on the scaffold with his dying friends.
No man attended them. No pitying voice
Did bid, “God help them.” There they stood, alone,
With serene countenances, as't had been
Some solemn festival; until the wretches
Whose callous hands were to wring forth their breaths,
Laid bare their patient necks. They stood together,
And silently join'd hands.

When Babington

Saw the young, gallant Tichbourne, his dear friend,
Submit him to the cord—for on him first
The villain hangman laid his horrid hand,—
His manly visage changed, and on his knees
He dropped aside to pray, the piteous tears
Chasing the while down his averted face,
When suddenly was kneeling by his side—
Whence she did come I know not, nor what power
Had oped her perilous road—one that might seem
A vision from the skies ; so pure her beauty,
And so unseen her coming.

BALLARD.**Who was this ?****Villain—who could come there ?****GIFFORD.****"Twas Agnes.****BALLARD.****Caitiff,****Thou liest !****GIFFORD.**

**Why, then, her pure and beautiful spirit
Had left its form of clay to wander thither.
By Heaven, they were her living lineaments.**

BALLARD, (*in a suppressed tone.*)

Go on.

GIFFORD.

That vision seemed to strike around
A visible awe. It was most pitiful.
No sound broke in upon their parting prayer ;
The very ruffians that did do him dead,
They seem'd to wait his time. He came to them.
Yea, when his friends had pass'd, he calmly rose
And bent him to the executioner,
Whilst she remained still praying on her knees,
Fair as the alabaster ; and as fix'd
As is the marble—statue-like, all, save
Her lips, which faintly moved.

BALLARD.

Why dost thou pause ?

GIFFORD.

Because my voice is choked even with the thought
Thou bid'st me to give words to.

BALLARD.

Fool ! go on.

GIFFORD.

When they had snatch'd him from the fatal beam,

Still stirring with warm life—even at the noise
She turn'd her head, and faintly moved her hand ;
And they did lay the dying Babington down,
His head upon her lap.

I saw no more !—

BALLARD.

What wouldest thou say, then ?

GIFFORD.

When the crowd recoil'd
In horror from the scene that then was closed,
I heard one saying through his tears, that thus
He lay ; and, seeming more like death than e'en
The dying, she did look into his eyes,
And whisper'd comfort to his fading senses,
And wiped the cold damps from his dying brows,
And held the crucifix before his gaze,
E'en till the speechless orbs were glazed in death ;
And the last savage mandates were fulfill'd.

BALLARD.

I'll hear no more of this. Where is she now ?

GIFFORD.

I know not. But Maltravers, whom you join'd
With me in this pursuit, sign'd with his hand

At distance 'mid the press. I well believe,
That wheresoe'er she be, he follows her.

BALLARD.

Go, out of hand, and strive to join him then—
Away. No, hark ! That man, that meddling jester,
Through whose contrivance she escaped away,—
Know'st thou what hath become of him ? I dread
Some mischief from that fool's officiousness.
Would he were hamstrung. Thou art twice a bungler
To let him 'scape thee thus.

GIFFORD.

Remember, sir,
I have but two eyes, nor but one pair of hands.

BALLARD.

Had'st thou but used them as thou should'st have done,
We had made sure of him one way or other.
No help, this is but prattle—get thee gone,
And use thy wits, if thou would'st have my gold.
We must be quick ; and, what is more, resolved ;
Whilst she is here, some intervention still
May snatch her from my grasp. I've paid for her,
Ay, sold myself i'th' bargain, and, in spite
Of men or fiends, I will enjoy her——

Beast!

Why dost thou linger here?

GIFFORD.

I stay to know

Your course.

BALLARD.

That's true. I go to wait her coming,
Nor will I stir from thence. Begone, and prosper.
I, spider-like, lurk close within my web,
Until the prey be snared.

[*They retire different ways.*

SCENE III.—*An Apartment.*

BALLARD alone. (*He walks anxiously about.*)

There are some men, when they have dared an act
At which earth shudders, and the pallid sun
Grows sick to look upon, will haply feel
Keen inward gnawings, and the tooth o' the conscience
Eat out their sum of gain. Such men are fools.
Is't not extremes that temper the hard steel?
E'en so, methinks, in actions such as this,

And for such prize as mine, the soul should own
Itself wax stronger, knowing it hath pass'd
Through both the ordeals of danger and of bliss.
Night strides space, and yet she doth not come.
Methinks the gloom hath hasten'd, as if Phœbus
Had hurried from the sky, and the coy stars
Were half afraid to twinkle. Let them be so.
Her beauty shall be light enough for me.
A footstep—no ! Yes, by my hopes, 'tis she.

Enter AGNES, with a disordered step. She looks wildly round.

Here, here, at last—let me return due thanks
Or ere my wilder'd brain hath quite forgot
Mercy as well as suffering—for, methinks,
Forgetfulness were best of mercy now.
(*She kneels.*) Accept, oh God ! my thanks, that thou
hast born me
Through the hot furnace of this agony.
Do with me further as thou see'st best ;
And grant me,—though e'er to know pleasure more
Is not to be my lot, yet that I may—
If that to me is not impossible—

Have thine assistance to forget past woe,
Yet still, as suffering ought to be forgot ;
And if this greatest pang be not the last,
Still through my trials keep me innocent.
Temper the malice of mine enemies ;
Forgive their hatred ; and oh ! shield the friends,
The few—few friends those enemies have left,
Nor let the legacy of love be pain.

BALLARD (*coming forward.*)

Amen, amen.

AGNES.

Ha ! shield me, ye sweet Powers !

BALLARD.

Why start'st thou, lady—'twas a gentle pray'r.

AGNES.

Wretch, wretch ! oh ! never had I breathed that pray'r,
Had I once thought that ever eye of mine
Should rest on thee again.

BALLARD.

And wherefore so ?

I am thy friend.

AGNES.

Thou !

BALLARD.

I—nay, never task
That lip to frown, for it becomes thee not,—
And I would fain prove that my words are sooth,
Yea, therefore came I hither.

AGNES.

Frontless villain !
What drove thee here, I know not; but if hate
And loathing, more than for the foulest thing
That poisons eye, can drive thee hence—begone !
Shame is ashamed of thee, else would'st thou never
Dare meet the gane that knows thee.

BALLARD.

Pretty anger !
Fain would I, thou would'st know me for thy friend.

AGNES.

Friend ! and can such a word dwell on thy lips ?
Know'st thou not that I know thee—perjured wretch !
Cold-blooded traitor, sacrilegious wretch !—
Hence, thou incarnate treach'ry ; thou foul toad
Cased up in marble !——

BALLARD.

Call me what thou wilt,

Sweet railer ; words and looks cannot blot out
My written right ; I am thy guardian :
Know'st thou that character ? (*Show's a scroll.*)

Nay, never turn
Thine eyes away ! With all their power to change
That which they look on, there's no danger here.

AGNES.

'Tis Babington's !—oh ! how am I entoil'd ?

BALLARD (*cruelly.*)

Thus art thou written mine, and Fate hath set
A seal unto the bond. Mine thou must be,
Or else an outcast—for what tongue shall greet,
What hand shall clasp, what bosom shelter in't,
Aught that's derived of a regicide,
Or owns the hated strain of Babington ?

AGNES.

Iron-tongued man, as well as iron-hearted—
And can'st thou breathe that name ?

BALLARD.

And wherefore not ?

He knew the game at which he chose to stake :
He knew the penalty, and he hath paid it.
What was't to me, an if he loved a meteor
That singed the poor moth's wings.

AGNES.

Monster!

BALLARD.

Angel!

AGNES.

(*Aside.*) Shelter me, Heavens, shipwreck'd and cast alone
Thus among villains.

Oh, sir ! if your heart
Have left one drop of ruth, pity a being
Almost distract with misery already.
Why, why pursue a wretch whose abjectness
Can only move compassion ; whose sad eyes
Are blind and dim with tears ; whose shatter'd heart
Sorrow hath crush'd and kill'd ? List to me, sir ;
Indeed I am not worth the torturing.

BALLARD.

Thou talk'st in vain. Did'st thou beseech less well,
Had thy soft eyes less of persuasion in them,
Thy delicate lips less honied eloquence,
Thy silvery-falling tones less meltingness,
Thou might'st have better sped !

I love thee, lady,
And thou art mine. No tongue in all this world

Now will, or dare gainsay it. Mine thou art,
Past fate and fortune ; therefore, teach thy lips
A better office than to plead against me ;
I clasp thee for mine own, and Fate hath given thee.
—Nay, struggle not—Were every tear a pearl,
They should not buy thee from my arms.

AGNES.

Keep off ;

Keep off, wretch—if but for thine own vile sake ;
Heaven is above us still. Beware, I say ;
Despair is dangerous, and, to the mad,
Weakness itself is strength.

BALLARD.

I am mad, too.

Be that at once my arms and my excuse ;
Thou must with me, and therefore strive no more.

AGNES.

Say'st thou so ? Then this outrage and its cure
Be on thy head.

[*She draws a dagger and suddenly stabs him.*

He falls.]

He was a heart-stabber,
And laugh'd at blood ! Ay, gasp thy life away !

Hast thou not lied enough, and glosed enough ?

Still blood—more blood !—

And say there be, what then ?

If murder be the key, I have but play'd

The popular tune, and where's the coil ?

He's dead.

Now let their myrmidons come. If that my life

Shall pay the forfeit for this baffled villain,

'Twill well wind up this skein of ravell'd sorrow.

And now, what is there left me but to die ?

They say those sore tormented sometimes sleep

Between their tortures, and I long for rest.

When have I rested now ? 'Tis long, long past ;

At least to me it seems so.

(*Laying down the dagger.*) Lie thou there ;

This is my deed, and I will mother it.

(*She sits down by the body.*)

So quiet, sweetheart ?—Not a word ! i'faith

Thou almost shalt begin to creep in favour.

Methinks mine eyes wax heavy, as if sleep

Would steal on them. Yet this were a wild pillow !

Methinks my head feels light—though mine eyes droop—

No wonder one should sleep, that hath not wink'd
These four days !

(*She leans her head on her hands.*)

(*Starting up wildly.*) Hark ! hark ! Music !—'Tis ceased now—'twas the same I heard i'th' east turret ;—but there the screech-owl spoil'd all ! How cold I grow—my teeth chatter—This neighbour lump of ice hath frozen me—They come—ay—the executioners !—the executioners !

Enter PLASKET, followed by WALSINGHAM, SIR AMIAS PAULET, and Attendants.

PLASKET.

Thank Heaven, she's here. Woe and alas ! more death !
What sight is this ?—Dear lady—Agnes—speak.
Her eyes are fixed—alack ! my lord, to what
A ruin have I brought you !

WALSINGHAM.

How pale she looks !

Oh ! who that saw this statue animate,
Could e'er have wrong'd her

PLASKET.

Pity her, Heaven—alas !

Reason the guest hath fled, and the poor fabric
Totters to dissolution. Do you know me, lady?

AGNES.

Well!

Thou art the headsman—stay; not yet—not yet!
Tear not my heart out yet—’twill break anon.
Let me be buried with him—out, alack!
He hath no grave!—mine eyes darken—one breath more—
Babington!—Babington!

(She dies.)

WALSINGHAM.

She faints—her eyes close.

PLASKET.

My lord, her heart broke first; and these sad signs
Tell but that death’s within.

WALSINGHAM.

Assistance there;

Remove that carrion hence—and thou, good fellow,
Say what thou art, that renderest in this kind
These last sad offices?

PLASKET.

My noble lord,

A humble servitor of Babington.

WALSINGHAM.

In what capacity ?

PLASKET.

My lord, a jester's.

WALSINGHAM.

A jester's ?

PLASKET.

Even so, my lord.

WALSINGHAM.

Such is the world ;

So vanity doth end. Thou shalt serve me,
Though not i'the self-same way ; for now, methinks,
Thy trade is out of tune. Is it not so ?
But be thou of my house—and, whensoe'er
I would give Pride a purge ; and lesson me
How fickle Fortune is, and Power how vain,
Goodness how helpless, and Humanity
How frail—how sinful—and how full of tears—
Be thou the minister—and relate to me
All the sad turns of this sad history.
Now look to thy dead mistress—cover her face—
Mine eyes fill even like thine.

Take up the body.

She shall have fitting funeral and all duty.

(*Curtain drops.*)

FINIS.







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